Tilly Death Do Us Part

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Tilly Death Do Us Part

by Not_The_State

Summary

After their third death, players are pulled back to their previous server via a pre-set admin tether.
...Well. They're supposed to be, anyway. Unfortunately for Pearl and Scott, however, things don't always happen how they're supposed to.
This is a story of two friends thrown from a cruel game into a cruel world, and how they deal with it. (Spoiler: the same way they always do. With jokes and chaos.)

~

By the walls. I'm actually doing it. I'm writing a crossover between Attack on Titan and Double Life.
Updates depend on which is stronger: my sense of shame, or my heartfelt wish to see 5am Pearl terrorizing the Scouting Legion.

~

Edit: According to my comments, the best part of this fic is that Smajor "Does Not Know that Eating is a Thing"
Do with that what you will

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Enter the Void

Inter-server travel is weird.

As someone who experiences it a lot, Scott can attest to this. He's no admin, but with all the jumping around he has to do just to keep in touch with friends, plus the stuff he has to deal with when it comes time to organize MCC…

Well, let's just say he's pretty familiar with the Void Between Worlds.

It doesn't come as any sort of shock when he sees starry vastness and feels a chilling sort of nothingness around him after he blows himself up on the Double Life server. Grian had been very clear when he explained the rules: After your third death, you go back to the server you came from. Scott can feel the admin tether pulling him back to Empires even now.

But no. Something's wrong. The admin tether is supposed to feel a bit like a rope or bungee cord, pulling your data across the Void. Don't get Scott wrong, he can feel the nonexistent bungee cord, it's just… there's too many of them, and they're all pulling in different directions.

One of them has got to be the Empires one, but what are the others? Is it some sort of glitch? Did his soul-bond to Pearl not disconnect? If one of the tethers goes to Empires and another links to Pearl, what's the third? Hermitcraft? Or could it be MCC Island? He does spend a lot of time there…

But no. Which tether does what isn't important. What matters is that the lines are starting to pull taut, and Scott would like to avoid being ripped apart and/or becoming permanently suspended in the Void.

"Grian? If you can hear me, I think you forgot to disconnect the soul link!" he shouts into the Void.

The Void doesn't answer, and neither does anyone else. Scott can feel the tethers starting to tug uncomfortably.

"…Pearl!? Are you out there?"

Again, no response.

"Any Void-dwellers want to snap my tether and devour my data?"

Still nothing.

So much for getting help. Looks like Scott is on his own for this one, which would be fine if he had the slightest idea what he was doing.

For all his time as a fairly influential and well-traveled figure, he's never learned much about an admin's side of the multiverse. Even when he had to regulate the MCC Rising competitors, the most he ever did was use a command to whitelist someone, and that wasn't even completely him — it was NoxCrew that set the commands up. Server transport is completely out of his league.

But with all the time he's spent with NoxCrew, he's bound to have picked something up. At least, he hopes so, because if he doesn't figure something out fast these tethers are going to pull him apart.

Scott takes a deep breath to pull himself together, and focuses on the tethers. Two of them seem to be pulling in completely opposite directions- those will be the most problematic. He'll address them first.

Should he try to sever one of them? Scott can't write, or even modify, code, but mangling it shouldn't be too hard. No worse than snapping out of a glitch, at least. There is a risk that he cuts his connection to Empires, but he'll probably just end up on Hermitcraft or MCC, both of which have knowledgeable and readily-available admins to help him out. Even if he doesn't, all he has to do is get in touch with the admin of whatever server he lands on.

If worst comes to worst, Scott can make for the End and try his luck with a Watcher, but that's a last resort. Watchers' responsibilities don't exactly cover lost players.

Resolved, Scott chooses one of the tethers and starts breaking.

He isn't terribly good at it. His specialty has always been player magic, not code manipulation. But, he doesn't need to be good at it. He just needs to break the thing.

The experience is somewhat similar to breaking obsidian with his bare hands, but Scott can feel the tether chipping and breaking as he continues working at it. He can feel it pulling, too, which, while unpleasant, helps the tether to fray as it's damaged.

It takes ages, but, eventually, the tether snaps.

The recoil hits Scott immediately as the other tethers, the force of which was previously balanced by the broken tether, now pull him rapidly away from the whipping end of the broken tether. The small portion of tether still attached seems to be swishing around and catching on things, but Scott dismisses it in favor of turning to one of the remaining tethers and beginning to break it.

This one is more difficult to break, as it's less taut and continuously wiggles around, but Scott keeps going. He knows that if he doesn't, he'll eventually end up in the same deadlock as before.

He still doesn't fancy being ripped apart in a place where no one will ever hear him scream.

When Scott finally manages to break it, the tether begins whipping around, just like the other one did. It's probably not a very good thing, but… Scott will choose his life over some extra work for an admin any day.

The recoil hits, and Scott's inertia combines with the force of the remaining tether to swing him into a not-quite-orbit around whatever server he's still connected to. The overall effect is terrifying. He's moving at speeds fast enough to kill him with no control over his speed or direction and nothing but a not-really-a-bungee-cord for support.

A server comes into view, and Scott grits his teeth as he braces for a rough landing.

Pearl is shocked when she sees Scott stacking his TNT.

She knew they'd be fighting it out- between the lovely bloodlust effect Grian had crafted and the 'relationship troubles' story arc she'd been building with Scott, there just wasn't any other way to end the series. But just trying to blow her up? Absolutely insane.

Pearl doesn't mind, though. Insane has kinda been her thing the past few weeks.

Of course, the minute Pearl thinks she has a grip on how this is going, Scott has to do the exact opposite of what she expects.

(*Really, doesn't he know that communication is the key to a good relationship?*)

“Let’s be honest Pearl, you deserve this more than me,” he says, casually, like they aren’t deciding who wins the whole series.

And then he blows himself up.

Experience orbs splatter in a glowing mess of gore and items, shocking Pearl to her core.

“He sacrificed himself… for me?” she murmurs, stricken.

Then the soul link kicks in and she feels herself die.

It’s not exactly a foreign feeling for a professional crafter like Pearl. Honestly, between falling off her builds, mobs, and PvP content, death is practically inevitable. That experience makes the sensation all-too-easy to dismiss as she considers Scott’s choice.

On one hand, she’s a little miffed that she didn’t get the chance to fight it out. As someone who primarily focuses on building, Pearl doesn’t get a chance for PvP often, and the Double Life finale was a perfect excuse. She had dogs and everything!

On the other hand, Scott had the right to go out on his own terms. If he thinks TNT is a better way to die than being ripped apart by dogs, then that’s his business.

Besides, it cuts down on the inevitable hate they’ll get when they post the video to the Galactic Hub. If Scott had killed her, he would’ve gotten flamed for ‘stealing’ the win after Pearl had done all the work. If she had killed Scott, she would’ve gotten flamed for going insane and ‘bullying’ the other participants. Scott killing himself, however, both resolved the series and allowed an apparent redemption for their ‘relationship.’

Pearl sighs a bit. As much as she would’ve loved another fight, Scott had the right idea. They’re public figures. They can’t gamble with their reputations just because they’re itching for a fight. Besides, it’s just a game. She’ll have another chance in either the next Life series or MCC — whichever comes first.

With that mentally resolved, Pearl settles down to wait for the admin tether to pull her back to HermitCraft.

Then she realizes she should’ve arrived by now.

She determinedly does not panic. She refuses to live up to the human

stereotype of knowing nothing about other species' abilities and panicking because of it. Whatever admin and/or Watcher weirdness Grian had to do to make the world automatically boot both soulmates to their previous server after their third death, Pearl won't question it, no matter how weird it is to realize she's connected to multiple tethers.

Pearl tries her best to relax while the tethers pull her along. It's… hard, not to think about the fact that she's stuck in the infinite Void Between Worlds, being pulled by three times the usual number of tethers, but every time she begins to panic she forcibly reminds herself that Grian wouldn't let her permadie. He's mischievous, but he's not a murderer.

Not a true murderer, at least. He'll kill, but not when the victim isn't okay with it or can't respawn.

It gets even harder to stay calm when some of the tethers start to yank like someone is cutting them. Pearl refuses to give in to panic, though.

She will not be a human stereotype.

When a server finally comes into view, Pearl lets out a sigh of relief. She knew Grian wouldn't let her down.

Then she realizes the server is definitely not HermitCraft and calls Grian about six different things that will never be allowed into a video.

Arrival

Chapter Summary

Pearl and Scott find themselves in a very odd place.

Chapter Notes

It's very late and I would like to be in bed right now, but I promised a random person on the internet I would update today so *by Notch I'm going to do it*
Not going to lie here, I fully intended to abandon this fic immediately after posting the first chapter as a sort of closure for this terrible idea, but you fools commented and thus encouraged me to continue this abomination, so here we are.
Anyway... Have some fun cross-server introductions. Going to give you lot a casual warning for some weird worldbuilding stuff including vague, casual mentions to Watchers, the Moon as a goddess, a religion following said moon goddess, and severe judgement of the state of the (Attack on Titan) world.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Scott crashes into a stone-paved alley. He rolls with the impact as best he can, but he still takes a solid heart of damage.

“Ugh,” he narrates, less because the impact was particularly bad and more because he’s used to narrating for his viewers. “That wasn’t fun…”

Rolling his shoulders as he uses some of his hunger bar to heal, Scott glances around for landmarks. The only thing he sees is a giant tan wall that most definitely does not exist on the Empires server. He also notices that the alley isn’t built along block lines.

“That is… very weird.”

Scott starts recording, just in case, and focuses on the weird thinness of the beams on the surrounding houses.

“It’s not even a half-block wide…”

It’s not out of the question for similar structures to exist. Things as thin as 0.125 blocks can be crafted with magic, and in the more developed worlds players are using physical properties to create

smaller things through a process known as scientific modification. The communicator strapped to Scott's wrist is physical proof of that.

But using that level of technology for a house, of all things? It seems like a lot of effort for very little gain. Plus, it makes the house extremely vulnerable to mob attacks and harsh weather.

Maybe it's a server that's fully lit the Overworld? Or maybe he's on some big-shot's private server and the thin walls are supposed to be some sort of novelty flex.

Either way, it's probably a good sign. If a world is advanced enough to work around normal block limitations, they almost certainly have some sort of galactic hub he can use to get somewhere familiar.

Scott makes his way out of the alley in good spirits. He'll probably be back on Empires by lunch.

His good mood vanishes when he sees the inhabitants.

They're all dirty and shivering. Not a single one of them is wearing any sort of armor, and their clothes are tattered in a way that means they don't even have the baseline proficiency in player magic required to maintain a skin. The streets are dirty and wet but the people seem to be quite familiar with them. Everyone is eyeing his proper skin and clean face like they're hoping he has something valuable to take.

Honestly, with how these people look, they wouldn't need to take anything- Scott would give them his stuff willingly, if he hadn't lost his entire inventory when he server-hopped.

Another look reveals the population to be entirely human, which means there's probably some sort of racial discrimination going on here. Servers who discriminate one way often discriminate other ways too, so he should probably keep quiet about his LGBTQ+ status until he knows more.

There's not exactly anything Scott can do to hide the fact that he's human, but he'll just have to bear with whatever this server throws at him for now.

Speaking of this server…

Scott opens his communicator and hits the F4 button. Statistics come up on screen, including the server name- Attack on Titan, apparently. Scott carefully notes the address to give to the Watchers later, because

there is definitely some bad admin-ing going on here.

He also notices that this server is set to Hardcore mode. He'll have to be careful here. For all that he'd like to craft a sword and go give the admin a firm talking-to about taking care of their players, he'd rather not permadie without anyone knowing where he is. Besides, it's not like he's giving the admin free reign — the minute he gets a chance he's telling the Watchers exactly what's going on here.

Plan sorted, he looks around for someone to ask about meeting the admin. He eventually decides just to ask one of the players in the street — it's not like he has anything to steal, after all.

"Sorry miss, but would you happen to know how to go about getting an admin meeting?"

The woman replies in a language Scott hasn't heard before in his life.

"Umm… sorry, but could you repeat that in Galactic?"

The woman speaks again, still in that unknown language.

Scott winces. This… isn't ideal. He's not exactly a linguist — picking up a whole new language on the fly *really* isn't part of his skill set.

He supposes he'll just have to do his best..

"Smajor," he introduces, pointing to himself.

He repeats his official gamertag a few more times, just to make sure the woman gets the point. Then he gestures to her.

She still seems confused.

"Smajor," he clarifies, pointing to himself again. Then he points to the woman.

This time, the woman seems to understand.

"Lucille?"

Scott nods.

"Smajor," he says, pointing to himself. "Lucille," he repeats, pointing to the woman.

The woman nods.

Scott smiles. Names aren't much, especially when a brief glance at the woman's nametag would give him the same information, but it's a start.

Pearl wakes up in a very odd place.

The first thing she notices is the trees. They're huge — so big that she can barely see the leaves from the bottom. The trunks are at least two blocks wide, like a dark oak tree but taller.

The next thing she notices is the creature. It looks almost human, but the proportions are twisted and the height is two or three times the usual. The creature's mouth is open and drooling. Its eyes are glazed over, but hungry in a way nearly identical to a zombie.

Well, a zombie other than Cleo. Cleo is typically less 'mindless hunger' and more 'mindless fiddling with armor stands.'

Regardless, the look on the creature's face is plenty to convince Pearl that it's hostile, and probably not a player. She'll need to fight.

Well… more like run. She's in an unknown server with no tools or armor. A fight isn't going to go in her favor.

Though, that does raise the question of why it hasn't attacked her yet. It seems to be pawing at her, but it seems to be running into some sort of obstruction — a silvery-white barrier reminiscent of moonlight.

Oh.

There's a reason she's called PearlescentMoon. She used to be an official high priestess of the moon, with all the relevant responsibilities and perks. Perks like Lady Moon's direct protection, on very rare occasions.

Technically, she's still a high priestess, but… she hasn't done much in the religious regard since season 8. Something about your goddess crashing into your server and obliterating everything makes it hard to honor her.

It doesn't seem to make a difference to the Lady, though. She's protecting Pearl nonetheless.

"Lady Moon?" She asks anyway, out of a combination of shock and respect.

Little one, the Moon responds, and *Notch* has Pearl missed hearing her Lady speak to her.

“But… why? Why are you protecting me now, when you… In season 8… You…”

Little one, the Moon repeats, and Pearl goes silent. *It was no will of mine that brought tragedy to your server.*

Pearl feels her knees grow weak. Her Lady hadn’t attacked HermitCraft. She was innocent. She wasn’t that… *abomination* that wrecked the season 8 server and twisted Mumbo’s attempt at reconciliation into a weapon to warp her friend’s minds.

Pearl is so relieved.

“Lady Moon, I-“

There are more pressing things to attend to, little one. This world is twisted and harsh. You must prepare yourself for battle.

“But-“ Pearl swallows the lump in her throat. “But Lady Moon, I… I lost faith. I abandoned you. Why would you still…?”

Do not blame yourself for the machinations of my enemies, little one.

Pearl wants to cry. Her Lady is here and she is loved and she is forgiven. What has she done to deserve such mercy?

But the past is not today’s problem, the Moon continues. *To die in this world is to leave my sight forever. You must prepare for battle.*

“Of course, m’Lady,” Pearl agrees quickly.

Well, little one? You are a mage, are you not?

Pearl smiles a bit and strides over to the nearest tree, beginning to tap it in just the right way for magical damage to creep through it. A few moments later, she’s the owner of a log block.

Once she has two logs, Pearl makes a crafting table and a wooden sword.

“Am I to fight immediately, Lady?”

No, little one. You are to survive.

Pearl nods and sets about making a pickaxe.

Chapter End Notes

Scott: Oh dear, I seem to be rather lost... Let's speak with the local residents. I'm sure we can sort this out.

Pearl: My goddess who I thought was evil just saved my life and told me someone else framed her and that this world is plotting to kill me but I'm not allowed to die. Also there's a freaky giant, not-green zombie wandering around that looks like it wants to eat me. I have nothing but a wooden sword and a crafting table to my name and I probably won't survive the night *but by Notch I'll go down fighting*

Lucille: Whomst the [*chicken clucks very loudly*] is this teal-haired weirdo?

A Different Perspective

Chapter Summary

> Last chapter, Smajor met a woman named Lucille.
> This chapter, Lucille gets to know a man named Smajor. She's not terribly impressed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lucille has had a rough couple of days, to say the least.

First off, she had to run for her life from titans which *really* shouldn't have been able to get past Wall Maria. Then she got stuck in a refugee camp and given rare and tiny rations from the rudest soldiers she's ever met. Then, she had to sleep in the street because the refugee centers are overflowing and she's neither a kid nor ancient.

Finally, as if all that wasn't enough, she has to deal with this gibberish-spouting weirdo with teal hair.

If the woman was half as patient as she is, she would've told the man to screw off the minute he started babbling at her. Alas, she's too polite for her own good, so when the man starts trying to figure out her name, she gives it.

Of course, the man can't leave it at that. No, he has to start pointing to everything in sight and making weird gestures until she gives him the name of the thing. Then he has to tap at his weird metal bracelet for a few moments and start the whole process over again.

When he finally leaves after asking about the word for night, Lucille honestly can't be more relieved. The weirdo is gone and she can suffer in peace.

She stews in her own misery for a bit before her thoughts circle back to the strange man. Looking back on it, it's obvious that he wasn't right in the head. Maybe he's a Maria refugee and he hit his head too hard in the evacuation. Maybe he was just born special. Regardless, it explains his odd behavior.

Speaking of odd behavior… he'd seemed pretty worried when it started getting dark. Honestly, he was right to be. With everyone

being so desperate nowadays, there's no telling what might happen to someone during the night. Someone like him will be especially vulnerable.

But that's not her problem. He seemed well-fed and taken care of. He'll probably get back to some nice little home where there are people paid to put up with his weird word-charades.

But if he doesn't…

Lucille tries for a solid ten minutes to put the man out of her head. It's not her fault if he dies. In fact, it would probably be a good thing to have one less mouth to feed right now.

But still…

Cursing teal-headed weirdoes as she does, Lucille stands up and resolves to find the guy.

(*If he's perfectly fine, she swears to Sina she's clocking him in the jaw.*)

Lucille ends up spending an hour running around in the dark before she finds the weird jerk — Smajor, he'd called himself — staring off into space in the little park in the middle of Trost.

(*Distantly, she realizes that the tree that used to be in the middle of the park is gone, but she shelves that thought for later.*)

"Hey!"

Smajor looks up and waves.

"You got someplace to go?"

The man blinks, looking confused.

Right. His native language is gibberish, apparently.

Sighing, she tries to work out a way to get her message across.

"Night," she says, pointing up at the sky.

Smajor nods proudly and repeats the word, pointing up to the sky as well.

"Home?" she asks, trying to make it clear that she's asking a question

while pantomiming a roof over her head.

“Home?”

“Home,” she asks again, still pantomiming.

Smajor shakes his head no.

Lucille winces. That’s… not a good situation right now, especially for someone who needs to play a full game of charades to understand a simple question.

“No home…” she mumbles to herself. “Friends?”

Smajor repeats the new word dutifully, though Lucille has seen enough to know he won’t understand the meaning so quickly.

“Smajor, Lucille,” she begins, pointing to each of them, “friends,” she continues, indicating both of them. “Friends.”

Smajor smiles and nods.

“Friends.”

He seems a little too excited about that for Lucille’s comfort, but they can deal with that later.

“Other,” she begins, gesturing away from herself, “Friends.”

“Friends?” He questions, pointing between himself and Lucille.

“Friends,” she confirms, pointing between them. “Other friends,” she repeats, pointing away from herself.

He has to think for a good minute or two to figure it out, but eventually his features light up in recognition. Lucille allows herself a moment of hope before Smajor dashes it all away by shaking his head no.

“No friends?” she asks, hoping she’s interpreting wrong.

“No friends,” he repeats.

Walls curse it all.

Chapter End Notes

For those of you who don't know AoT canon, Lucille is not an official AoT character. She's a creation from the depths of my brain. Horrifying, I know, but necessary to facilitate the story. I mean, Scott has to learn the language somewhere, doesn't he? I'd tell you she'll be out of the story soon, but that would be a lie. She'll be around for another two chapters at least. Possibly more.
~
Smajor: I'm not doing so bad at this communication thing, am I? I'm figuring out words *and* I'm logging them on my communicator. I'll be chatting amicably in no time!
Lucille: This [*chicken clucks*] idiot

First Day

Chapter Summary

Scott and Pearl get themselves set up.
One of them has a far easier time of it than the other.

Chapter Notes

Guess who's back
Back again~
My bad idea
Warn your friends~
~
Speaking of bad ideas... This chapter, particularly the first scene, starts getting into some of our lovely worldbuilding. However, some of that is going to be a little hard to understand if you don't know at least the general idea of both the MCYT and Attack on Titan fandoms. To help those of you that are only familiar with one of those, here's a really brief synopsis of both:

Attack on Titan:
100 years ago, giant humanoids ranging from 3 to 15 meters tall called 'titans' emerged. These titans don't need food and regenerate from any injury unless you slice away a weak spot on their nape, in which case they die instantly. The titans are active during the day, but are lethargic or fully immobile at night. They seem to be driven solely by a compulsion to consume humans.
In the face of the man-eating titans, humanity was forced to withdraw behind three massive, 50-meter circular walls arranged one inside the other. Shortly before the story began, a 60-meter 'Colossal Titan' and a 15-meter 'Armored Titan' with skin too thick for swords to break through joined forces and managed to break through both gates in the border district of Shiganshina, forcing humanity to abandon the outmost wall, Wall Maria. This led to overpopulation within the next wall (Wall Rose), shortly followed by widespread famine.

MCYT:
MCYT stands for 'Minecraft YouTuber.' The fandom encompasses any YouTuber who plays any amount of Minecraft at any level, though popular YouTubers and those who play on SMP (Survival MultiPlayer) servers are common picks.
This fandom is a little weird since there's no hard-and-fast canon

to draw from. This is because the different YouTubers create their own lore, often independently of other YouTubers. There are a few common tropes within the fandom, but, again, they're not really hard-and-fast rules.
The YouTubers starring in this story are PearlescentMoon and Smajor (who also goes by Scott, Smajor1995, and DangThatsALongName).
Smajor is most known for organizing MCC (MineCraft Championship), but he's also active in several SMPs including the Life Series and Empires SMP. If you want to see his videos, look up DangThatsALongName on YouTube or Smajor1995 on Twitch.
PearlescentMoon is known for her amazing building, as well as SMPs such as Hermitcraft (the oldest still-running SMP!) and the Life Series. If you want to see her videos, look up PearlescentMoon on YouTube or Twitch
This fic officially begins at the end of the Double Life Series, in which several YouTubers came together on a server with a few special rules:
1) Every player gets three lives. On the first life, your name is green. On the second life, your name turns yellow, and on the third, red.
2) When you reach your last life (aka your red life), you become 'hostile,' and must attempt to kill all remaining players on the server. Note that you can still form alliances, but you have to maintain your goal of killing. This often leads to a 'Red Alliance' forming to kill remaining green and yellow names, then promptly dissolving into anarchy once everyone is on their last life.
3) At the beginning of the series, every player is randomly paired with an unknown 'soulmate.' Soulmates' health bars are linked, so if one takes damage or dies, so does the other, and if one heals, the other does too.

Pearl and Scott were soulmates in Double Life, and at the end of the series Scott used TnT to kill himself because there could only be one winner and he believed Pearl deserved it more, since she'd just eliminated four competitors. It was epic and you should totally go watch the video. Just look up 'PearlescentMoon Double Life' on YouTube. I promise you won't be disappointed.
~
Anyway, that's that for my little synopsis. There's honestly a ton more I wanted to say, but that would start taking us into spoiler territory, so... no more information for you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Scott has gotten very lucky in this server.

Going up to Lucille has been his best decision so far. The woman was lovely, going so far as to come check on him on his first day, as well as helping him learn new words and navigate the city since then. She'd also done wonders in explaining how this server works.

Apparently things don't spawn at night, even though the city— Trost, apparently— isn't very well lit. Scott's current hypothesis is that the weirdly-thin blocks used to build act like slabs or carpets and stop spawning.

That explains the big walls too. From what he's gleaned thus far, they exist to keep monsters out. That would make sense if they wanted to keep things from entering the spawn-proofed area.

Scott isn't sure why they didn't just build a fence, but hey— he's a content creator, he can't exactly judge someone for going outrageously over-the-top on a build. Besides, it does a lot for the city's aesthetic. Makes the whole thing a lot more grand-looking.

It's a shame that grandness isn't paired with a better quality of life, but from what Lucille has communicated to Scott, it's for a good(ish) reason.

Apparently there used to be another, outer wall, but monsters broke through and overran it. They didn't have anyone skilled enough with player magic to fight them off or repair the wall, so they had to withdraw. This meant they didn't have enough land to provide food through traditional farming, and, again, they didn't have anyone skilled enough in player magic to expedite production. This left the survivors in a massive famine.

There was no mention of an admin in the story.

All this has led Scott to the growing suspicion that this is an 'undeveloped' server. One that hasn't progressed enough to slay the dragon and gain contact with other servers.

Even for an undeveloped server, though, this world is horrifyingly unadvanced. From the look of it, there isn't a single person who can so much as maintain a proper skin, let alone do any complex form of player magic. The mines are all surface level and there aren't any mobs, so there isn't even a proper environment for anyone to figure it out. Jeb, from the look of things, the general population doesn't even know that player magic exists!

On the somewhat positive side, it means the admin here isn't being intentionally neglectful. They just have no idea what they're doing.

This makes Scott's position significantly more complicated. See, intergalactic law states that it's illegal to travel to or communicate with an undeveloped server. It's a good rule— it keeps less developed servers from being conquered and overrun by more developed ones, and it gives different cultures time to develop. The problem is that it makes Scott an official fugitive.

The Watchers probably won't execute him for a mistake. They might, however, execute him for meddling too much, but he needs to meddle or he'll never get back home.

This, of course, is a bit of dilemma.

Scott could try and figure out all of the admin stuff himself. The problem is, if he screws up, he's dead.

He could try to use the portal in the center of the End to contact a Watcher, but he'd have to kill the dragon for that, which would officially change this world's status from 'undeveloped' to 'developed' long before they're ready for visitors from a foreign server. It would also probably put him on the naughty list, legally speaking.

Lastly, he could try to teach player magic in this world and advance it himself, but he doesn't know what sort of legal ground that will put him on when he gets back.

It's a weird situation, and not one Scott has a way out of yet. For now, though, he's just setting up and keeping a low profile. He's got a nice little underground base going now. He made a tree farm with saplings he got from a tree he mined on his first day, alongside a simple wheat farm and a manually-dug mine. He's been hearing mob sounds recently in the tunnel, so he thinks there's some kind of cave nearby, which is good for two reasons: First, it's bound to have some good ore, and second, it'll give him access to mob drops.

Void knows he could use some bone meal. He could use it to speed up his wheat production, which would make it far easier to feed himself and Lucille. He might even be able to help some of the other refugees if he expands the farm enough.

For now, though, he places his armor (*an iron chestplate, with very little wear from lack of use*) on his armor stand and gets ready to meet Lucille. He won't learn a language in a cave, after all.

Pearl is not a speedrunner. That said, there's still a few things she can learn from Dream.

Things like hiding underground like a mole.

Really, the masked man was onto something with that one. It gets you blocks, protection from mobs, and a convenient place to start a mine all in one go. Pearl will have to thank him if she survives this death world.

For all her strength, Lady Moon cannot protect Pearl forever. Especially when she's a mere crescent rather than in her full form. The Lady is, however, gracious enough to warn Pearl a few moments before she has to relinquish her barrier.

By this point, she already has full wooden tools and a half-stack of planks, so she's not terribly worried. She's a mage. An armed mage, at that. Sure, it's a flimsy wooden sword, but it's better than nothing and will *probably* do alright if the creature outside the barrier has zombie stats to match its appearance.

When the barrier falls, Pearl comes out swinging. She gets more than a few good hits on the thing. Rather than dissolving into smoke and exp, however, its wounds begin to steam and stitch themselves together.

And isn't that weird? The creature has *wounds*. It's been a long time since Pearl has seen anything so lacking in the magic department that it can't use its health bar to absorb physical damage.

Strangely, the creature's lack of any sort of magical ability sets Pearl back more than it helps her. Pearl's combat experience is almost exclusively with mobs, and when it's not mobs on the other end of her blade, it's fellow mages who use their health bar instinctively. The sight of a cut is… foreign, to say the least.

Honestly, Pearl isn't sure what to do about it. With mages and mobs, you just hit until their health bar runs out and their avatar collapses in on itself. With a creature that tears and bleeds like this one…

Pearl doesn't know. Does she try to cut off a limb so it can't follow her? Try to force damage directly to its health bar? She's heard of people doing that, before, in tournaments where it would result in twice the health drain for a single hit. It's a standby for dedicated PvP'ers. It even has a name- a 'critical hit,' or 'crit.'

But Pearl is not a dedicated PvP'er. She's not very confident in her ability to land the hit, and even if she manages it, she has no idea how that strategy would work on a nonmagical being like this one.

Hence, hiding like a mole.

Pearl uses her blade to knock the creature back a few times, then retreats quickly and pulls out her shovel. By the time the creature recovers Pearl is three blocks down.

The creature scratches at the surface above her, knocking loose dirt down into her hole, but Pearl ignores it and digs another two blocks. Once that's done, she hollows out a little room to catch her breath in.

It's… irksome, being forced to run from a fight, but Pearl doesn't have a choice until she learns more about that weird not-zombie. Besides, all she has is wooden tools. Tactical retreat is perfectly understandable.

Of course, if Pearl is going to retreat, she's going to make the most of it. She's dug down already- why not upgrade to stone while she's here? And at that point, why not mine down for iron and diamonds?

Pearl will need a mine anyway, if this world is as dangerous as her Lady said. And considering how worried the Lady was about her dying… it's probably a hardcore world.

But all that is *fine*. She's an expert mage, with the beginnings of a mine and a crafting table to hand.

Pearl will be okay.

Chapter End Notes

> Scott: *does the standard YouTuber set-up for a long SMP*
>
> Pearl: Call me Dream, 'cause I'm about to speedrun this sh*t
> ~
> Anyway... That's it for this update. If you enjoyed, leave a like and subscribe!
> (As you may be able to tell, I'm really embracing the method acting here)

Rot

Chapter Summary

> Pearl has a rough time in a cave. Fortunately for her, a zombie is there to help.

Chapter Notes

> Anyone else hyped for MCC 25? We have Socket Duo, baby! I'll be watching Wilbur, since my sibling says he and I have very similar personalities. Which, honestly, is kinda worrying, but I digress.
> For those of you who have no idea what I'm talking about, MCC stands for Minecraft Championship and features a ton of different Minecraft Youtubers such as our main characters. It's happening on the 25th of September if you want to watch. Both of the main characters of this fic are playing, with Pearl on the Blue Bats team alongside Illumina, FalseSymmetry, and ElainaExe, and Smajor on the Pink Parrots team alongside WilburSoot, Grian, and Ph1lza. You can watch any of these people on Twitch on the day of the event.
> Anyway, in honor of the Socket Duo, here's an update!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pearl has found a cave.

Normally, this would be a good thing. Caves mean ores for mining, structures for exploring, blocks for building, and more. Early game they're essential for getting proper armor and tools.

The problem with caves is that they spawn monsters like nobody's business. This means Pearl will likely have to fight for access to those ores.

Now, Pearl is not a weak fighter, by any means. She just got four kills back-to-back on the Double Life server! And those kills were player-mages, not simple mobs like zombies and skeletons.

But simple mobs are dangerous when you can't heal. And right now, Pearl can't heal.

It was a silly oversight. Every player knows that they need to gather food as soon as they can.

But Pearl didn't. And now she's on three hunger bars and won't be able to heal. Notch, if things keep going the way they are, the starvation might do her in!

Pearl needs food. Tragically for her, there's not much food to be had dozens of blocks underground.

Well. Except glowberries. They're not the best food, by any means, but they'll do the job in a pinch.

Pearl thinks she can see a slight glow deep down in the cave. It might be glowberries. It might be lava.

If Pearl goes into the cave, she risks being worn down by mobs or starving to death. If Pearl turns and heads back to the surface, she risks depleting her hunger bar and starving before she reaches the top or getting cornered by that weird non-magic zombie again. If Pearl stays put…

Well. She'll never get home standing still, will she?

So. Up to the surface or down to the caves.

It's not an easy choice. Pearl will admit to spending a good bit of time just standing at the precipice of the cave, thinking of all the ways things could go wrong. But… at the end of the day, Pearl is a mage, and she's been in more caves than she can count.

It's better the mob you know than the one you don't.

Decided, Pearl places a torch to mark her tunnel and begins using her vast quantities of cobblestone to create a quick-and-dirty staircase down.

When she gets close to the bottom, a zombie wanders over to stare at her. This one is normal, thank Mojang. Nothing like the abomination from the surface. It's a standard two blocks tall, it's flesh is a standard sickly, rotting green, and its skin is a standard tattered cyan shirt and blue pants. The only thing it shares with its surface brethren is the look of hunger, and even then the zombie's expression is hostile where the abomination's was a weird sort of giddy, like the creature was excited for the impending fight.

"Is it weird that I'm glad to see you?" Pearl asks the zombie.

The zombie groans and swings at her, but Pearl is too high to reach.

“Yeah, I think so too.”

Pearl thinks the zombie might be glaring at her. Maybe it’s annoyed she won’t come down and fight. Maybe Pearl is just projecting her own annoyance with the state of the world onto the reanimated corpse.

“Well, this has been a lovely chat, but I’ve got things to do, so…”

Pearl hefts her sword and slams it down onto the zombie’s skull. The zombie makes a hissing-groan of a sound and jumps back, but quickly returns to its vigil beneath her ledge. Pearl whacks it again.

The part of her that’s used to having iron tools at an absolute minimum is a bit shocked when the zombie doesn’t dissolve into smoke and exp, but with a stone sword, it makes sense. Stone just isn’t as strong as other materials.

Of course, that’s why Pearl is down here in the first place. To get geared up for a proper hardcore run.

So, Pearl whacks the zombie again, and it dies.

Pearl quickly finishes her little staircase and places a torch to light the area. She checks to the left, and, with no mobs in sight, heads right towards the glow she saw earlier.

A tiny bit of scrambling over stone later, Pearl sees several long vines hanging down from the roof of the cave. Glowberries.

Thank the Lady.

Pearl steps towards the vines, ready to sate her hunger and get back to mining. She isn’t focusing on anything but the berries in front of her.

That’s why she doesn’t notice the skeleton until it’s fired an arrow into her side.

Instinctively, Pearl twists away part of her health bar into absorbing the hit. Too much health, to be honest. She can’t regen and she has no armor.

Pearl can’t take another hit.

But, Pearl has been a mage for a long time. She knows how to deal with monsters. So, she hefts her blade, dodges the next arrow, and clobbers the skeleton until it dies.

Pearl grabs the bones somewhat vindictively. The moment she finds some seeds, these are going towards a farm. Stupid mob is going to help make sure she never dips below half-hunger again.

Another arrow whizzes past Pearl's ear. She just can't catch a break, can she?

Pearl throws down a few blocks of cobblestone in a hasty barricade, just in time to stop the next arrow from sinking into her chest. It won't be enough. Pearl can already hear the clanking of bones as the skeleton circles around to Pearl's right.

Instead of fighting the skeleton, Pearl blocks herself into a protective cage.

(*She can't take another hit*)

Pearl grits her teeth. She can't leave the box without the skeleton hitting her. She'll die if that happens. She'll die if she just sits here.

"Void curse it all," she swears under her breath.

What is she supposed to do? She can't fight unless she heals, and she can't heal unless she fights. All she has to her name are wooden tools, some torches, and the rotten flesh she grabbed from that zombie earlier.

Wait.

Rotten flesh.

It'll give her the hunger effect, so it's not exactly a permanent solution, but if she eats all of it in one go, she *should* be able to heal up just enough to deal with the skeleton. Enough to get some proper food in her and hole up somewhere safe to settle her nerves.

Pearl pulls the rancid flesh from her inventory. The smell is absolutely revolting— she wants to puke just holding it. Every piece of Pearl's brain is screaming at her not to eat the horrid, slimy junk in her hands.

But desperate times call for desperate measures.

Before she gets the chance to lose her nerve, Pearl slurps down the suspiciously-squishy meat, fighting the urge to gag the whole time. The hunger effect kicks in immediately, making Pearl shudder. She

keeps eating anyway.

Her hunger bar is discolored, but for a brief, shining moment, it's full. Pearl channels it into replenishing her health bar as quickly as she can.

The energy from the flesh doesn't last long enough to heal her fully, but it's enough to gain her a few hearts. Enough that she can take another hit.

(*Pearl wants to vomit*)

Pearl whips out her pickaxe and mines through her little box. The skeleton comes around to shoot her, but Pearl is ready for it. She clobbers the creature's ribs before it has a chance to react.

The skeleton still manages to fire a shot into Pearl's gut, but one more solid whack has it dissolving into smoke and exp.

"Oh, thank the Lady…" Pearl sighs, placing some torches to prevent more monsters from spawning.

Finally, Pearl gets to the reason she came this way in the first place: the glowberries. She yanks them off the vines and eats her fill, finally, *finally* managing to bring her health back to full.

That… was too close.

Pearl can't turn back now, though.

Chapter End Notes

> So... Pearl is having a rough go of things. Don't worry though, I'm sure she'll get things figured out
> Anyway... Let me know in the comments who you're rooting for this MCC! Also, you know, tell me what you liked about the chapter and all that, but more importantly, Socket Duo!

Lucille

Chapter Summary

Lucille reflects on the enigma that is Smajor.
Also Scott adopts a gang.

Chapter Notes

I am *extremely* sorry for the delay in posting. I got sick and then I started dual enrollment (go to college while I'm doing high school), so I've been *very* busy.
However, my English 101 professor let us out early, so have a chapter!

Lucille is starting to warm up to Smajor.

This has absolutely nothing to do with any sense of pity or responsibility for the man. As a matter of fact, the more miming she has to do to teach him words, the more she wishes she'd never met the man in the first place. Seriously, how hard is it to understand the word, 'go?' Lucille has met two-year-olds who pick things up quicker than this man!

However, said verbally-challenged annoyance does have one redeeming factor:

He's *really good* at finding food.

Notice that Lucille says 'finding' and not 'stealing,' because she's clinging to her plausible deniability for all she's worth. It's more than a little suspicious how Smajor manages to get a fresh loaf of bread for both of them every day, but at this point Lucille is desperate enough to not question it. It's not like she can do anything about it. She doesn't know who he's nicking from anyway. She might as well profit while she can.

"Lucille! Hello!" the teal-haired man calls jovially.

"Smajor."

He has more bread in his arms. Lucille's stomach lurches a bit at the sight of it. Yeah, this man is worth the trouble of miming. Honestly, she might well have starved if he hadn't turned up.

As Smajor closes the gap between them, a couple of scruffy-looking kids come up next to him. One of them tries slipping their hand in his pocket, and Lucille begins moving to intervene-

But Smajor's hand is already locked around the kid's wrist in a vice grip.

Damn. Apparently he can take care of himself.

The kid seems to be tearing up now. His buddies are looking between him and Smajor nervously. Lucille just waits for Smajor to throw the kid away and come over.

Smajor, to the surprise of everyone present, makes the unorthodox choice of crouching down until he's level with the kid. He doesn't say anything, but he smiles kindly and rotates the kid's arm so his palm is face-up. Then he puts a loaf of bread in the kid's hand.

The kid blinks. He certainly wasn't expecting that turn of events. Then again, neither was Lucille.

Really, giving away food? In the middle of a famine? Who does Smajor think he is?

Of course, he doesn't stop there. No, he waves all the kid's buddies over, then gives each of them their own loaf of bread. It's good bread, too— not grey and stale like the stuff the military gives out.

Lucille tries to push down the ugly feeling in her stomach at seeing the food go to kids instead of her. It's Smajor's food to begin with. He can do what he wants with it. Besides, the kids are happy, at least— they have the happiest faces Lucille has seen around Trost in a long time.

Once all the kids have been dealt their food, Smajor makes an odd gesture towards them, with his hand curled except for his thumb, which is stuck straight in the air. He holds the sign until the kids mimic it back at him, then smiles and waves them on their way.

It's only after the kids have waved their goodbyes that Smajor turns to Lucille. She smiles wanly at the man. Looks like they'll both be going hungry today. But hey, at least the kids got fed.

Lucille makes another attempt at shoving down her bitterness.

Once upon a time she was a lot less selfish. Then she stopped being

able to afford generosity.

Smajor reaches her and offers-

…Another loaf of bread?

Lucille reaches out and takes it disbelievingly. That has to be, what, the fifth loaf of bread Smajor has given out in the last five minutes? Where in Sina's name did he get all of this?

Lucille looks up, trying to figure out how to convey her question. Smajor just grins and winks at her before she can say anything.

This man…

Awkwardly, Lucille tries to recreate the thumb-up gesture Smajor had given the kids. The man seems surprised by it at first, but quickly reciprocates, smiling widely.

The kids turn up again the next day.

Lucille cringes a bit. No matter how good Smajor is at finding food, there's no way he can get enough to feed four kids on top of what he's already getting for himself and Lucille. The extra bread yesterday was a lucky fluke, but not something to be relied on.

The apparent leader of the group steps forward.

"Umm…" he starts awkwardly. "We just came by to say, uh… thanks. For the food yesterday. And, uh, sorry for trying to grab your wallet."

Smajor looks attentive enough, but Lucille can see that the man has no idea what was said.

"You'll have to do a bit more if you want him to understand you," she offers.

"Huh?"

"He's not exactly the most eloquent of people. He doesn't really *get* talking. If you want him to understand you, you'll have to be a bit creative."

The kids blink as they process the new information.

"How come he can't talk?" one of the kids asks.

Lucille shrugs.

“No clue. Met him after Maria fell. Maybe he got hit upside the head worse than he could take. Maybe he was just born special. All I know is that he knows a grand total of twelve words and he’s damn good at finding food.”

The kids blink again. Silence settles over the group as they consider each other.

“Lucille?” Smajor asks, breaking the silence. “What?”

Ah, Smajor’s most-used word: what. Lucille had taught it to him very early on. She’d figured it would be a word Smajor would need often.

She was right.

“So, uh… is there any way we can talk to him?” one of the kids pipes up.

It’s in that moment that Lucille sees an opportunity. See, for all that she complains, Smajor is actually pretty endearing. He’s like a puppy: constantly confused, but still willing to try to help. The problem is that puppies take a lot of training— or in this case, pantomiming— to become suitable for anything more than ‘cute nuisance’ status.

However, if Lucille could outsource that pantomiming to someone else — a small group of street kids, for instance— she would get all the benefits of being friends with Smajor without having to try and figure out how to convert the word ‘soldier’ into interpretive dance.

“He does pretty well with gestures,” Lucille tells the kids after a moment. “If you point to something and say the word, he’ll learn it. He’ll remember it if you repeat it enough. It’ll take a bit, but you might be able to teach him enough to get your apology across.”

The kid nods. He and his buddies then converge on Smajor, and start pointing to random things and saying the words over and over.

Lucille tries to refrain from cackling maniacally. This is looking like the start of something beautiful.

Spooky Scary Soul-Eating Plant(?) Things

Chapter Summary

> Pearl stumbles on something scary deep in the darkness of the caves.

Chapter Notes

> So, um... It's been a while. Two whole MCCs have gone by without any comment from me. JojoSolos ascended to S-tier, SocketDuo happened twice in a row, and Fruitberries broke his dodgebolt curse.
> Oh yeah, and Tubbo got drunk. He and Fundy should make a club.
> Anyway, all MCC-related stalling aside, thank you to each and every one of you who waited so patiently while I pulled this chapter together. The comments have been super nice, and seeing one in my inbox never fails to have me smiling on an otherwise homework-ridden day.
> So, as thanks to all of you, have Pearl getting spooked by some soul-eating plants/fungi/unknown entities for spooky season.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pearl finally allows some of the tension to drain from her shoulders as she equips her freshly-crafted iron chestplate. She's not invincible, by any means, but she'll at least be able to tank a few hits if necessary.

As if on cue, an arrow comes flying towards her out of the darkness.

Pearl nearly grins as she spends a tiny fraction of her health bar to absorb the damage. This skeleton won't be any problem.

Once the mob is dealt with, Pearl continues through the cave system in search of iron.

The mining is far more leisurely, now. Pearl has spent plenty of time in various cave systems, looking for ore and building material, and it's not half as dangerous with some proper gear. She finds herself relaxing as she slips into old routines. Torch in one hand, sword in the other, pick in her hotbar for when she finds something of value. It's just her and the stone.

Or deepslate, now. Pearl hadn't noticed herself going that far down…

A hiss echoes from behind. Pearl turns and smashes a spider to bits, almost without thinking about it. She grabs the string absentmindedly.

If Pearl has hit deepslate already, there's a good chance that she'll be able to find diamonds. It'll take a while, since the generation rate changed, but a diamond sword is too good to pass up.

Yeah. This ought to go well.

Pearl hisses and jumps back the minute she sees the dark, squishy blue of sculk beneath her feet.

The creator holds her breath for a moment, straining her ears for any sound. But, nothing happens. There's no glow from an unnoticed sensor. No cry from a nearby shrieker. And, most importantly, no digging from an emerging warden.

Thank the Lady.

As soon as she's sure she isn't about to be obliterated by the warden, Pearl crouches and steps right up to the edge of the sculk.

There's a dark, looming structure in the distance. It's shaped like a massive rectangle that almost reminds Pearl of a portal. However, there's no purple glow or endless void to indicate a path to another dimension. Only empty space.

Around the not-portal, a labyrinth made of dark stone and crawling with sculk sprawls outwards.

Pearl has found an Ancient City. On her first day.

Of course she has.

Pearl has full iron at this point, but that doesn't mean she wants to risk tangling with a warden. Those things are *stacked* .

But… she hasn't found a single diamond yet. And Ancient Cities are known to have diamond gear. Food, too, though that's less of a problem with half a stack of glowberries in her hotbar.

It's not like there's too much danger now that she knows the city is there. All Pearl has to do is sneak in, mine the wool from the pathway as she goes, and use it to surround herself when she opens the chests. *Easy*.

Yeah. This makes sense.

Carefully, Pearl crouches down and quiets the little magical signal that lets other mages know she's there even when they can't see her. She begins slowly making her way towards the city. The waving fibers of sculk sensors pass by as she walks, but they don't light or signal their brethren. They only continue writhing like kelp in the ocean.

Pearl reaches a pathway made of cyan wool. Still crouching, she reaches down to mine out a block of the stuff.

Intellectually, Pearl knows that mining or placing wool doesn't set off sculk, but her nerves have her glancing around anyway.

There's nothing. Not even a stray bat or spider. It's completely silent, in the eerie way that all Ancient Cities are.

Pearl tries not to think about *why* it's so quiet.

Turning back to her task, Pearl continues gathering wool. She needs, what, fifteen pieces to box herself in fully with a chest? Well, fourteen, technically, but she needs to fill a corner to get the roof placed right.

Fifteen pieces isn't too hard.

It takes a while to get enough, especially with the path changing between full blocks and just carpet, but Pearl manages.

Finding a chest is deceptively easy. If Pearl was a bit less experienced than she is, she might be tempted to throw it open and get straight to looting. But Pearl knows what that will bring.

(*She remembers a cacophony echoing behind her, vibrating her organs into shreds.*)

(*She remembers laughing with the 'Soup Group' about another silly death, back when silly deaths didn't matter. When they were only a small setback.*)

(*She remembers her lady, telling her that this world is* ***cruel.***)

Pearl places her wool carefully. Not a single sound will escape her little box. Not a single bit of sculk will detect the noise. The chest will creak, but she will be safe.

Even knowing the wool will muffle the noise, Pearl still flinches and glances around when the hinges of the chest *screech* from long disuse.

The sound is grating on its own. Add in the fear of waking the unbeatable monster that is the warden?

Yeah, Pearl isn't really feeling the 'old and creaky' vibe.

Pearl shakes away her nerves and looks down into the chest. And by the *Lady*, is she glad she did. Right there, in the chest, lies a pair of enchanted diamond leggings.

Grinning, Pearl grabs them to inspect them closer. It looks like they've got Thorns III on them — not Pearl's preferred enchantment, but useful nonetheless, especially in a combat-heavy environment.

Pearl equips the leggings quickly and turns back to the chest. There's not much of value left, now that the leggings are gone. There's only a few lumps of coal and some regular books.

Pearl considers a moment, then throws everything into her inventory. The coal will come in handy eventually, whether it's for torches or smelting, and she'll need books to get enchanted anyway. She might as well grab these ones while she can.

After the first few chests, Pearl starts to fall into a comfortable rhythm. Place wool, sort through chest, mine wool, repeat. It would probably be relaxing, if not for the looming threat of the warden.

But, Pearl is a hermit, and for all their collective experience, none of them are very good at staying in low spirits. There's always a bright side to be found. In this case, Pearl will argue that the bright side is the suspicious soup she finds in one of the chests.

Haha. Soup.

Pearl is 80% sure this particular soup will either blind her or give her slow-falling. The other 20% possibility is poison.

(Pearl still plans on trying it later)

Pearl continues on through the chests, picking up some miscellaneous odds and ends, plus a lucky Otherside disc.

She's on the last chest when things get *really* good, though. At first glance, there's not much: some bones, a couple of candles… the usual junk.

Then, she notices *it*. A book with a soft glow emanating from it. And

there, on its spine, in the angular letters of Standard Galactic, are the words, “*Swift Sneak III*.”

Oh, this is going to be *fun* .

Pearl hastily scoops the book into her inventory and shuffles out of the Ancient City as quickly as she can without setting off the sculk.

She has what she came for, plus a little extra. Now she just needs to get an anvil to use it with.

(*The elation of the find almost has Pearl forgetting why she was so worried about losing a life in the city in the first place.*)

(*Almost.*)

Chapter End Notes

> Poor Pearl... She's really not having a good time right now. At least she got swift sneak, though. I'm sure she'll have fun with that.

Chickens, Children, and Guilt

Chapter Summary

> In which the chickens are plotting to ruin Scott's life.
> (No seriously, the chickens are a menace.)

Chapter Notes

> I'm back, folks! It's only been, what, two weeks? That's not too bad, is it?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Scott groans as he bangs his head against a hopper for the third time today, causing a chicken feather to shake loose from his hair and float down to the ground.

"*Make a chicken farm*, they said," Scott narrates to no one. "*It's easy*, they said. *It doesn't work and you'll end up covered in chicken feathers and singed from the stupid lava,* they conveniently forget to mention!"

Scott has spent the last three nights trying to set up an automatic chicken farm so it's a bit easier to feed himself and Lucille.

(And the kids)

(And the extra kids the original kids have started bringing with them)

(And some Wall Maria refugees he's met recently)

(And that one cat that seems to have taken a liking to him)

Unfortunately, for all his time as a player-mage, Scott is still not good at redstone. Even a simple chicken farm seems to be beyond his reach.

Unless maybe he adds another repeater…?

Many repeaters later, Scott's base has been totally overrun by chickens.

The machine still doesn't work.

Eventually, Scott has to admit defeat, and he pulls out his brand-new diamond sword to clean things up.

In the far corner of the room, on a shelf well away from any possible redstone mishaps, a communicator buzzes, unnoticed amidst the dying clucks of an army of chickens.

>*Pearlescent Moon has made the advancement* [Sneak 100]

Moments later, the notification is buried beneath the births and deaths of the massive server Scott has found himself in.

Scott returns to the surface world somewhat grumpily, with phantom chicken feathers causing him to twitch every so often. Really, who made chickens so chaotic? Scott would like a word with them.

(*And maybe a video of them stepping on a Lego. Or fighting an army of chickens. Really, either works.*)

It's not until Scott sees Lucille that he remembers: He forgot to get food for Lucille and the kids.

Void.

It should be alright though. They all survived just fine before he showed up. They can handle one day without Scott's help, right?

Scott almost has himself convinced until he sees one of the kids. He swears they're getting skinnier every day — he can *literally* see their ribs, for Jeb's sake!

It'll be okay though. All Scott has to do is make some sort of excuse to leave and tell everyone to wait for him to come back in a language he barely knows. Easy.

Scott reaches the group, and Lucille greets him.

"*Hi Lucille. Friends,*" he responds proudly, because progress is progress, and he's managed to address both Lucille and the kids correctly and individually, so it's a win.

Lucille nods and says hello. Then she says a lot more things. Scott thinks he catches the words for 'kids,' 'you,' and 'excited,' but he's not 100% sure. Lucille does look fairly happy, though, so he smiles in what he hopes is an appropriate reaction.

One of the kids bounds up to him and says something he *does* recognize:

"*You have food?*"

Scott winces.

"*Sorry,*" he begins, because he really is sorry he forgot food. Seriously, what kind of player goes somewhere without *food* ?

Not a good one, that's for sure.

The kids look crestfallen. Scott feels sick to his stomach just thinking about the food in his base that he should've remembered to bring.

"*I look?*" he offers, hoping the excuse will give him a chance to run and get every little scrap of bread in his chests for these kids.

"*It is okay,*" Lucille says slowly, not continuing until Scott nods his understanding.

Lucille turns to the kids and explains something in words Scott doesn't know, but understands regardless. The kids just shrug and nod, and Scott suddenly wants to convert this entire messed-up world into farms so he doesn't have to watch children look so resigned to starvation ever again.

The group recovers way too fast from Scott's pseudo-betrayal and begins their usual routine of pointing out new things to help him learn the language. Honestly, Scott feels terrible accepting their help without giving something in return, but every time he tries to slip away, a too-bony hand grabs his wrist and drags him along towards the next thing they want him to know the word for.

It's almost completely dark by the time the kids leave.

That's something that's still odd to Scott. Staying outside, exposed, even when it's dark enough for mobs to spawn, is… foreign. Something his player-mage instincts scream at him to avoid. After all, half of being a good survival-player is knowing when a situation is too much for you to handle — which an unsheltered night often is.

But, in this world, things do not spawn in the settlements. To walk the streets at night is as safe as it is during the day.

So, once the kids have left, he stays for a few moments more with Lucille, just to make sure she gets back safely to the place where all the other hungry people go to spend the night.

At some point, Lucille stops walking and pulls him aside.

Scott blinks. Normally they go straight to that "*refugee center*" as soon as the kids leave. Why is Lucille pulling him aside now?

He gets his answer when Lucille pulls a greyish lump of bread out of a pocket and breaks it in half, offering a piece to him.

Scott can't help but stare for a few moments as he processes the situation. Lucille is giving half of her food to *him* . To Scott, who has enough food in his base to feed half the people in the refugee center for the night if he wants to. To Scott, who gave up on the stupid chicken farm. To Scott, who had the audacity to *forget* that there were people who were relying on his support.

"*No,*" he rejects, shaking his head. "*I am okay. Not…*"

Scott grits his teeth as he tries to remember the word to finish his sentence. He knows one of the kids told him before, but what is it?

"*Eat,*" Lucille insists, pushing the bread towards him.

"*No. Not need.*"

Scott would be happier remembering the word if it didn't just make Lucille push the bread towards him more insistently.

"*Eat,*" she emphasizes. "*I will not.*"

Scott shakes his head again. Lucille seems to misunderstand, because she starts pantomiming like when she first taught him the word 'eat.'

"*I understand! Not need.*"

"*Have anyway.*"

Scott can't say he knows what the word "*anyway*" means, but the context makes it pretty clear.

Scott tries a few more times to get Lucille to keep the food for herself.

It doesn't work. Lucille just keeps stubbornly shoving it at him, again and again. Eventually, Scott accepts, if only because Lucille is starting to look pretty upset at his stubbornness.

As he eats, Scott pledges that he'll get some sort of farm worked out. He owes it to Lucille.

Besides, the idea of tons of people starving in a hardcore world because of lack of access to magic doesn’t sit right with him. The Watchers may not approve of too much meddling, but they can’t possibly object to him helping with something as mundane as farming.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you all enjoyed that chapter!

P.S. Before you go, I was thinking a bit, and I came to the realization that my update schedule is... a bit inconsistent.
...
...Okay, it's a lot inconsistent, but not because I don't want to be updating! I have a ton of fun writing this fic! The thing is, real life is conspiring to prevent me from updating. I can't really change that, but what I *can* do is make like, a Discord server so I can let you guys know *why* updates take so long, and when I think they'll come.
Of course, I don't want to make a server if no one is interested, so if you really want to know what's going on let me know in the comments. If I get, like, idk... five people? Yeah, that's a good number...
If I get five people who say they want a Discord server, I'll make one. Otherwise I'll just keep on posting as I have been.

Anyway, thanks for reading, and toodles! ^-^

The Monologue of Lucille

Chapter Summary

Exactly what it says on the tin

Chapter Notes

Heads-Up: This chapter has some discussion of mental illness. It's really slight (like two short paragraphs), but if the vocabulary and/or euphemisms trigger you, you'll want to skip from "On the downside, it means she'll be separated from Smajor," to "Honestly, Lucille was probably getting a bit too reliant on Smajor anyway," which is about two paragraphs down.

Anyway, be safe and enjoy the chapter ^-^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lucille wakes up to hunger pangs.

It's… a bit odd. The sensation is cripplingly familiar from the days right after Wall Maria fell, but at the same time, Smajor has been handling food for so long that Lucille just isn't used to pushing through the hunger anymore.

That's all the more reason for Lucille to push through, though. Smajor has been doing so much to help. Lucille needs to start pulling her weight.

Besides, there's still the army rations. Lucille doesn't get much, being an unskilled, unemployed single woman, and the taste is terrible, but it's enough to squeak by.

Speaking of army rations, it looks like the queue is forming for the morning handouts.

Lucille shuffles over to take her place in line. A couple of kids immediately jump in behind her.

The line winds out of sight before long.

When Lucille starts getting close to the front of the line, the kids start whispering furiously.

“Look!” the blond one calls, pointing to a sheet of paper tacked to a support beam.

Lucille looks where the kid is pointing, more out of boredom than anything else. There’s a poster there. It has an intricate seal inked on the corner.

…A royal proclamation? Has the government finally decided what will happen to Lucille and her fellow refugees?

Once Lucille gets her ration for the day, she shuffles over and begins to read the poster.

Apparently the government is putting the refugees to work in the fields.

Honestly, Lucille isn’t too upset with that. She used to be a milkmaid out in Maria, so she’s used to farm work, and the extra farming means there’ll be more food down the line. All good things, in Lucille’s opinion.

On the downside, it means she’ll be separated from Smajor. Lucille still isn’t sure whether the man is a refugee or not, but even if he is, the proclamation specifically excludes the mentally impaired.

Lucille wouldn’t call Smajor mentally impaired. That said, there’s no questioning his horrific lack of speaking ability. One conversation with a soldier would probably have them convinced he’s touched in the head, whether he is or not.

Honestly, Lucille was probably getting a bit too reliant on Smajor anyway. It’ll be good to be making her own living again. Besides, this way Smajor won’t be stretched so thin trying to take care of her and the kids.

Yeah. This’ll be fine. It’s not like there’s anything Lucille can do about it anyway. She might as well accept it and move on.

And if she’s the tiniest bit worried about Smajor and his lack of language ability?

Well, that’s her business, isn’t it?

Chapter End Notes

Short chapter today, but I wanted to get something out.

Anyway, last chapter I asked whether anyone would be interested in a Discord, and only a few people responded, but those people were super nice and definitely the kind of people I'd want to talk to, so, um... Discord link!
https://discord.gg/mFbPcfMQzv

(Heads-up: I have no idea how to run a Discord server so I just clicked a template and hoped it worked so if it's terrible sorry I will happily fix anything if you're willing to tell me how to fix it ^-^)

Soup and a Cottage

Chapter Summary

Some Pearl POV because I wanted to wax poetic about soup.

Chapter Notes

I RETURN!
Finals are over folks, and I'm ready to get back into this lovely fic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pearl calmly sips her soup in the corner of a brightly-lit cave.

Darkness overtakes her vision. She's distantly aware of the [Blindness] status settling into her code.

Pearl snickers a bit. *Soup.*

The woman calmly waits for the effect to recede while she considers her next move.

Her main goal is obviously to find her way back to Hermitcraft. That's where she meant to go after Third Life ended, and she sees no reason to change her plan. However, given how worried Lady Moon was, Pearl is willing to bet that getting back won't be as simple as she hopes.

Theoretically, all Pearl needs to do is message the server's admin for a boost to the nearest hub server. But Pearl doesn't know who this server's admin is. Plus, with how weird everything on this server is, there's a chance that there are extra steps involved in leaving.

The artificial darkness of the [Blindness] effect begins to fade from Pearl's vision. The player-mage takes another sip of soup, causing the darkness to return, and goes back to pondering her situation.

At current, she's set up, in the loosest sense of the term. She'd say she's Third-Life-Set-Up, which, for her, isn't really that set up, but is enough to survive off of. Maybe enough to withstand head-on PvP for a little bit.

Honestly, Pearl isn't very comfortable with that. Third-Life-Set-Up works because all of your opponents are guaranteed to be Third-Life-

Set-Up too. This server, however, is a complete wildcard. Lady Moon said it was dangerous, but that doesn't mean primitive. The players on this server could be scraping by with wood and stone tools — or they could be sitting on Hermitcraft-level farms and going to battle in full enchanted Netherite.

It's a toss-up, and not one Pearl wants to bet on.

The takeaway here is that Pearl would like to get herself Hermitcraft-Set-Up as soon as possible. That means farms, a base, enchants, potions… Maybe a villager trading hall, if Pearl can manage it. Oh, and a Nether portal. She'll need that for the potions.

Right then. Pearl ought to get to work.

Pearl decides to build her base underground, since she's already here anyway. She chooses a massive lush cave she'd been through earlier to build in.

Glancing through her inventory, Pearl takes stock of her blocks. It's mostly rocks. Cobble, granite, calcite, deepslate, the works. Pearl *has* just been mining, after all.

She has some ore, too, of course, plus her loot from the ancient city and some dirt and a sapling from when she was on the surface.

…Pearl can make this work.

She starts by combining granite and dirt to make a pinkish platform. It's not too tall — it's only two blocks high at its steepest point — but it's enough to give Pearl a good, flat foundation to build on. She'll need to add some grass or farmland or trees or something to break up the pink, but that can come later.

For now, Pearl grabs some cobble and starts marking out a floor plan. It's pretty basic overall. Just a box, plus another box jutting out as a foyer and a space that Pearl mentally designates as a porch.

Next she makes some support beams. Pearl decides to do them using stone brick walls, rather than the usual wood pillars. For some reason she's just really feeling the stone brick right now. Maybe being underground for so long has made her think of strongholds?

Regardless, Pearl stacks the walls five blocks high to allow plenty of room for interior decorating.

With the pillars decided, Pearl gets to work on the walls. She starts with diorite, both polished and unpolished.

Pearl mumbles a quiet apology to Iskall as she works. She loves the man, but sometimes the gradient just has to come first. Besides, she doesn't exactly have many blocks on hand. Iskall would understand.

After a very sparse application of diorite — she hasn't *completely* betrayed Iskall — Pearl finishes the rest of the walls with calcite.

Pearl steps back to consider her build thus far. The gradient is a little janky in some spots, but those can just be windows later. The support beams do a good job breaking everything up, too.

Now Pearl just needs a roof.

She checks her inventory. There's a lot of different rocks there. Enough for plenty of steps and slabs and other decorative odds and ends.

Pearl isn't sure which block to use though… Should she go for the dark contrast of deepslate? The pinkish, earthy tones of granite? Should she forgo rocks completely in favor of the multiple stacks of copper in her inventory?

Decisions. Such tricky little things.

…Eh. Pearl will figure it out as she goes. For now, though, she needs to make herself a stonecutter.

Pearl looks over her finished build.

She's gone through and replaced a lot of the granite-and-dirt platform with grass, with the exception of her porch/patio area. She's also added a small wheat farm and an oak tree.

The build itself is cosy. The stone brick wall pillars add support and frame little windows made of oak steps and slabs, plus a very sparse application of iron bars which probably came from Pearl's weird bout of stronghold-related inspiration. The walls are white, but not to the point of being artificial. Instead, the color is just off enough that it looks natural. The roof, too, is very natural-looking. All that can be seen from the ground is sloped granite stairs, which look almost like dirt in the low light. From the top, however, it's a lovely little platform of grass and moss.

All-in-all, Pearl is very proud of her build.

The only slight caveat is the lighting. Currently, the whole thing is lit by torches. Obviously, they do the job, but the torch spam is a bit ugly. Pearl would like to get rid of it altogether if she can.

Maybe she can use shroomlights instead? She'll have to go to the Nether for those, but she needs to go there for potion stuff anyway.

Speaking of the Nether… Pearl ought to go find some lava.

Chapter End Notes

> Casual reminder that I've got a discord server: https://discord.gg/z8WVBN2JT7

How to Say "Sandwich"

Chapter Summary

Smajor does not know how to say "sandwich"

Chapter Notes

Hello friends!
Casual reminder that I've got a discord where I give sneak peaks of upcoming chapters. You can join here: https://discord.gg/mFbPcfMQzv
Without further ado, enjoy some Smajor content!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Scott has what is, quite frankly, an *obscene* amount of food on his person.

This isn't because he has any particular need for extra food. As a matter of fact, he probably needs less food than usual. He hasn't exactly been doing a lot of fighting or long-distance running lately, so his hunger hasn't been depleting as fast, cutting the amount of food he needs in half.

However, Scott does have a small posse he would like to keep from starving. A small posse whom he let down yesterday.

So, he has a lot of food. Different kinds, too. There's the usual bread, but there's also some apples from his tree farming and chicken from when he had to clean up his attempts at redstone.

The moment Scott sees Lucille, he shoves his food basket into her arms.

(And yes, he brought a basket. There's only so much he can play off without having to explain the whole "player-mage from another server" thing, and Scott still isn't sure where that would put him with the Watchers.)

Lucille blinks. It seems she wasn't expecting to have a basket shoved at her. That doesn't stop her from taking it, though.

Lucille is awesome like that.

Curiously, the woman lifts the cloth and peeks into the basket. She gasps a bit, then looks up at Scott, probably to ask a question.

“For yesterday,” Scott offers.

“It’s too much…”

Scott does a little mental happy dance for understanding Lucille’s entire sentence. Then the meaning of that sentence sinks in, and he shakes his head.

“It is right amount.”

“I can’t eat all of this…”

“Give with kids.”

Lucille blinks. Then, slowly, she nods. Scott just grins in return.

The kids show up shortly after that. They all seem a bit flighty and anxious today, but they still jump right into finding new words to teach Scott.

It honestly warms his heart. Lucille and the kids have both done so much to help him adjust to this weird, cramped, player-less world.

…Awkward first meetings aside.

After a short lesson in which Scott learns how to say “jump,” Lucille starts dealing out food to the kids. She starts doing something weird when she does, though. She pulls the bread apart and puts the chicken into it. She ends up sort of layering the two together, so the bread acts like a wrapper for the chicken.

It’s weird.

Eventually, Lucille hands one of the chicken-bread-layered-things to Scott. He tries to refuse it at first. Unfortunately for him, Lucille is very stubborn.

Scott takes it reluctantly.

(*That food was supposed to be for the others!*)

Curiously, he takes in Lucille’s creation. She’s gone through and torn the chicken apart so it’s evenly distributed between the two layers of bread. There’s enough space between the chicken and the edge of the

bread that the meat isn't in danger of falling out, but not so much that it's completely surrounded by the bread.

Normally, Scott would just absorb the food straight into his hunger bar, but he probably shouldn't do something so player-y in front of Lucille.

Well, not again, at least. And certainly not in broad daylight. He's lucky Lucille didn't notice anything last night — there's no need to tempt fate.

But how else is he supposed to eat? The kids seem to be biting off portions of the chicken-bread-layered-thing with their teeth, but where does the food go after that? Are they absorbing it properly without realizing? Or are they doing something else to make up for the lack of magic everyone on this server seems to share?

Well, Scott will just have to give it a go and see, he supposes.

Carefully, Scott raises the layer-thing to his mouth. Then, he uses his teeth to cut into it, pulling a small portion of the layer-thing into his mouth like the kids seem to be doing.

Scott blinks a bit as he holds the food in his mouth. It's… a bit odd, to be honest. The bread is soft in his mouth, rapidly turning spongey as it absorbs his saliva. It's all cold, too, from sitting in the chilly basket for so long.

He sneaks another glance at what the kids are doing. They seem to all be doing something with their jaw… Maybe squishing the food somehow?

Scott tries using his tongue to squish his food. It works alright on the bread, but the chicken remains stubbornly in one piece.

Hmm… maybe his teeth would work better?

He tries grinding the chicken between his back teeth. This works far better than squishing it with his tongue did, breaking the chicken down into mushy shreds in no time.

Step One: Accomplished.

…What now?

The kids seem to be doing something weird with their throats, too.

They almost look like frogs.

Huh… Maybe they're swallowing the food like frogs swallow magma cubes? Scott honestly can't think of anything else they would be doing…

Well, nothing to do but try, right?

Carefully, Scott tries pushing the mushy food mixture to the back of his mouth. It's easy enough.

Then, it hits the back of his tongue, and he has to clench his mouth shut to keep from spitting it out.

"Are you okay, Smajor?"

Scott nods rapidly, trying not to let on that he has no idea what he's doing.

"Are you sure?"

Oh Notch, he needs to figure this out, and fast. Everyone will be so worried if he doesn't. Which, fair, since they have no idea he can just absorb it magically, but the whole point of making a giant underground wheat farm to feed these people was for them to be less worried! Not more!

Well, at least he knows about the weird spitting reflex. All he has to do now is ignore it.

Stubbornly, Scott forces himself to finally swallow the food-mush. It hits the spitting reflex again, but he pushes through and manages to get the food down.

Victory!

(Distantly, he wonders whether that spit-reflex thing has anything to do with llamas spitting when attacked. Maybe they have a lot of those reflexes, and they get triggered when they're hit?)

(No, that's not possible. Everyone knows that spitting is part of the Llama AI, and mob AI is part of the world code — aka, magic. It has nothing to do with weird, nonmagic ways of eating.)

Scott gives the group a thumbs-up to reassure them.

…They don't look very reassured.

Regardless, Scott manages to swallow the rest of the layered-thing, and nobody calls him out on it, so he's taking it as a victory.

Maybe he can use this to mess with people later. Everyone he knows would flip if they saw him gulping down food like a frog with a magma cube. Their reactions would be amazing. He could probably do a whole video on that alone!

Oh, or maybe he could make it part of an escape room? Maybe in order to get a key or cut off some time they're told they have to eat food without using magic… That would be hilarious.

It's settled. The minute he gets back home, he's using his new skill to mess with anyone he can get to do a video with him.

The day continues on normally, with the addition of a snack break for Lucille and the kids to eat their apples.

This time, Scott manages to get out of having to eat with them. And honestly? Thank Notch he does. Eating without magic is *weird* . He swears he can still feel the mush sliding down his throat. Even thinking about it is making him shudder…

Anyway.

The day continues as normal. He meanders a bit with the group, the kids teach him words, and Lucille does her best to explain things to him when he gets confused.

For example: apparently the people in the uniforms are all fighters, but instead of being in different factions like he'd expect, the symbols on their backs indicate which job they do within one giant faction. The ones with the wings go out and fight mobs — which is honestly really impressive, considering the fact that nobody here knows magic — the ones with the roses keep watch and fight if a mob gets through — which explains how they deal with creepers when they inevitably blow holes in their wall — and the ones with the horned horses deal with all the internal stuff.

It all seems very neat and organized. It's a relief, too: When Scott first saw the people with the different symbols, he'd been worried they were opposing factions and that a fight would break out. Luckily for him, there's only one faction, and that one is focused on keeping mobs away from everyone else.

Speaking of mobs… it's starting to get dark. He ought to get home and sleep, lest he ruin those fighters' hard work by making phantoms spawn inside the walls.

The kids are shepherded away easily enough. Lucille, however, doesn't leave with the others.

"Walk with me."

Scott… isn't sure what Lucille wants. But she's been a great friend and ally thus far, so he'll trust her until she gives him a reason not to.

They go to a little park. It's the one where Scott got that first tree and sapling when he was flung into this world. Since then, he's replanted, and a blocky oak tree with a carefully-placed anti-spawning lantern now shades the park.

Lucille turns around to face him. She looks pretty serious. It makes Scott the tiniest bit nervous.

When she starts talking, she speaks slowly, like she isn't sure what to say. Or maybe she just really wants to give him time to figure out what she's telling him…

"I am going away."

Scott blinks. What in the world does that mean?

It takes a long time, but eventually, through copious amounts of miming, Scott manages to get the gist of what Lucille is saying.

Apparently the government is finally doing something about the famine. They've decided to take all the people who used to live in the wall that the mobs got through and have them work to farm food.

Lucille happens to be one of those people. That means the government will be taking her to some fields to work.

Honestly, Scott is glad that the people in power seem to finally be doing something about the famine problem. No matter how hard he works or how many nights he goes without sleeping, there's only so much he can do without knowing how to make the megafarms so dear to more technically-minded players.

There is a bit of a problem, though. Lucille going to farm means they'll be separated, which is bad twice over. For one, Scott doesn't

want to leave his friend alone. And for two, he kinda still needs her help. The kids are great and all, but they're too young to be responsible for themselves, let alone for helping him bumble his way through this world.

Of course, there's a very simple solution to this.

"I go with."

Lucille blinks.

Chapter End Notes

OwO
AoT plot? Is that you?

Squelch

Chapter Summary

Lucille monologues.
...She does that a lot, doesn't she?
Eh... it's fine. At least we have Smajor and Pearl to break up the monologues with some *chaos*

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long, but you have to understand:
Precalculus

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lucille… hadn't expected Smajor to want to follow her.

Sure, they've known each other for a while, and the man doesn't seem to have other friends, but he's obviously set on food. Giving that up to move to a new place and farm with her?

Well, it's more than a gesture. It's a sacrifice. After all, whether Smajor is stealing or working for his food, leaving the city will surely prevent him from doing… whatever he's doing.

Of course, it might just be for the kids. They're all refugees. They have to work, just like everyone else.

But then, Smajor hadn't known that when he'd said he'd come with her, had he?

At this point, Lucille owes Smajor a lot. Sure, teaching him to talk can be a bit of a hassle, but at the end of the day, he kept her from starving. That's not something she'll forget.

It makes her feel more than a little guilty that Smajor is coming along. After all, he's giving up whatever stability a man who can't talk could possibly have to follow her. And she's, what… played charades? Anyone could do that. Sina, the *kids* do that!

But Lucille can't get Smajor to stay. She tried. So, she will take this favor, and she will remember it, and, one day, she will find a way to repay it.

Now that Scott knows he'll be moving soon, he has a lot of prep work to do.

Step one is, of course, packing up. He hasn't been in this world long, but he's managed to acquire a lot of junk in his time here.

His limited inventory space becomes a problem fast. He doesn't have any shulker boxes, or even an Ender chest, so there's nothing he can do to expand it.

Scott quickly realizes he'll need to pack efficiently. He'll also need to focus on bringing stuff to get set up in his new area, rather than toting stuff between bases.

Obviously, he needs a lot of tools. This is… a bit of a problem, considering tools take up a full inventory slot each.

There's a simple solution, though: Don't take tools.

It sounds a bit crazy at first. However, Scott does have a plan. By bringing a stack of iron, he only uses one inventory slot, and he can make as many tools as he needs when he gets to wherever the government is sending Lucille.

He applies the same logic to sticks. Instead of crafting them separately, he grabs a stack of logs to get himself started, plus some saplings to get another farm going.

Scott continues in the same fashion for a while. He crafts bone meal into blocks, brings cobble instead of furnaces, and so on.

At first, the whole thing is pretty novel. It's new and strange to think about carrying items as their components. But, soon enough, it devolves into what it's always been: storage organization.

Scott isn't exactly *against* organizing his stuff, but it's not exactly fun, either.

Unfortunately, he doesn't have the luxury of procrastinating. That's the drawback of not remembering to ask your friend *when* you're moving to a brand-new place to become a government-employed farmer.

…In hindsight, Scott really should've asked about that.

Nothing for it now though, he supposes.

Still, Scott really wishes there was someone to help him out. Maybe Pearl. She's an amazing cleaning lady…

But Pearl isn't here, and Scott has nobody to foist his chores onto, so he continues packing.

Pearl sighs as she dumps another bucket of lava into place.

Before her, an unbroken rectangle of obsidian now stands. Something deep within her recognizes the power of such a shape. All it needs now is a spark. Something to release and direct the power inherent in the very makeup of the portal-to-be.

Pearl blinks a bit. She must be *really* tired if she's waxing poetic about Nether portals, of all things. Maybe she should sleep before she goes?

…Eh. She'll be fine. Besides, last season's Boatem taught her better than to sleep before she starts physically drowning in the phantoms as they swoop down upon her like the sky-rats they are.

(She's perfectly fine, why do you ask?)

Pulling out her flint and steel, Pearl quickly strikes a spark into the portal frame. Purple light spins to life.

She steps into the portal without hesitation. Hazy, whirling violet fills her vision for a moment. Then the heat of massive lava lakes hits her face, and she knows it's time to step out.

Pearl has to catch herself to avoid stumbling into a puddle of lava.

Well, at least she knows she's definitely in the Nether.

Pearl glances around to take in her surroundings. Then, she groans.

Loudly.

"Seriously?" she narrates to nobody. "Of all the biomes I could've had to spawn in… A basalt delta? *Really?*"

The only answer is the *squelch* of newly-spawned magma cubes.

Chapter End Notes

> Casual reminder that you can get sneak peeks at upcoming chapters in my discord server!

Link: https://discord.gg/6hAHNbCDUm

Farms and Lava

Chapter Summary

Is that-?
It can't be... After all this time... the author is actually including a canon Attack on Titan character!?!?
Things are changing in the world of Tilly...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mikasa carefully catalogues the people milling around the refugee camp.

Last night, they'd all been moved from Trost to this farm. Fortunately, she, Eren, and Armin had managed to get themselves on the list for the same farm, though it had been a close thing. If the officer had been slightly less willing to bend the rules, it wouldn't have happened.

Luckily, the orphan card was a strong one to play. Mikasa and Eren had managed to talk the officer into listing them as dependents of Armin's grandfather. Now, in the eyes of the government, they couldn't be separated.

Thank the walls for small miracles.

Of course, that doesn't mean they're in any better of a situation than before. They're still stuck with a ton of desperate, hungry people, some of whom will certainly be willing to take food from kids who are weak from a day of labor on the farm.

But that just means Mikasa will have to be extra alert.

"What's with that guy over there?" Eren asks, far louder than can be considered polite.

"Eren, you can't just point at people!"

Mikasa disregards Armin's chastising in favor of glancing towards the man Eren is pointing to. He's dressed strangely, in dark blue pants and a white shirt with a vivid red stripe, plus another, looser red shirt overtop.

The clothes pale in comparison to the man's hair, though. On his head is a mop of light, bluish-green hair punctuated by a streak of the same vivid red color that makes up the man's shirt.

Overall, the effect is strange. The man's clothes are unique and in good condition, but he's standing in the middle of a refugee camp. The colors are highly saturated, to the point that Mikasa isn't sure what natural dye would produce such an effect, but everyone around the man is pale and washed-out. And the hair… By the walls, what does someone *do* to get hair that color?

Then again, it's not really relevant. What's important right now is survival. A random, brightly-colored guy isn't going to get in the way of that.

Suddenly, the man glances up.

Mikasa blinks and looks away. It's stupid to make enemies on the first day, let alone over something as silly as staring.

(*Had that man's eyes… been red?*)

The people on the government farm hover.

A lot.

Don't get Scott wrong, he's happy that they're looking out for the refugees! And he understands that in a world where nobody even knows how to maintain a skin, safety in numbers must be a popular strategy. However, Scott is quite capable of handling himself, and would very much like his space so he can get set up properly.

"Oi! What're you doing out here?"

"...Walking?" Scott offers, because he isn't fluent enough in this language to give a better excuse.

"Well, you'd best be walking back to the bunks with the rest of your lot."

Scott can't tell you exactly what the soldier said, but he can definitely figure out the meaning behind the phrase.

Well, no new base today, it seems.

Pearl has one goal: Find a Nether fortress.

Ideally, there's one within a few hundred blocks that hasn't been raided by anyone yet. If she can clear it, she'll have access to nether wart and blaze rods for potions.

She'll need to grab some soul sand on the way, too, so she can farm the nether wart. Oh, and maybe some bone blocks to tidy up the gradient on her cottage. Speaking of her cottage… Shroomlights would be very nice to have. Warped wood, too, if only for some decorative custom plants.

But the fortress comes first, obviously.

Pearl immediately makes a beeline out of the basalt delta. She runs into a few more magma cubes than she would've liked on the way, but honestly, it could've been a lot worse. At least she hasn't been knocked into lava.

…Yet.

The next biome is a crimson forest, where Pearl comes to the uncomfortable realization that she isn't wearing any gold. This isn't a problem, per se. Mining some gold to craft armor is easy enough. It's still a rather significant setback, though.

It seems she'll be in the Nether a bit longer than expected.

The piglins wander aimlessly, Pearl's new gold boots preventing them from attacking. She doesn't bother pausing to trade. It would take too long to get enough gold for that, and she'd rather not give hoglins any more time to spawn.

(She does pause briefly for some shroomlights, though.)

(…What? They're aesthetic.)

The crimson forest flattens out into a regular netherrack waste, which then drops off into a massive lava lake. Across the lake, Pearl can just barely make out a corner of dark nether bricks.

A fortress.

…Pearl's going to have to bridge across the lava, isn't she?

As if on cue, a ghast shrieks from above.

Chapter End Notes

Blitz day one complete!
What does that mean? Join my Discord server and find out!

[Spooky Scary Skeleton]

Chapter Summary

Pearl in the Nether, what's she gonna do~?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Scott wants to laugh maniacally.

He holds it in, of course. Then he remembers that he's alone and cackles anyway.

The soldiers thought that they could keep him in. That they could prevent him from making his new bunker. That they could *cage* him, like a common mobile. But now, he stands victorious, a new wheat field spread before him, broken only by the area which will soon be his new tree farm.

(*Scott easily dismisses the part of his brain reminding him that the soldiers probably just wanted to make sure he didn't wander off and get hurt.*)

Scott has never been so proud of a hole in the ground.

It has a long way to go, obviously. He'll need to start a mine soon. Hopefully he can get a more automatic food farm running too, so it can run while he's working above ground with Lucille and the kids.

And he'll need to decorate, of course. Maybe he can do a bit of a hobbit hole, like he did in Third Life? The tree farm ought to be plenty on the materials front…

Yeah. He'll do a hobbit hole.

Pearl throws herself across the last few blocks between her and solid ground just in time for a ghast fireball to destroy the part of the bridge she'd been standing on.

Pearl glares up at the offending demon-squid. Really, couldn't it have waited for Pearl to get herself situated before blowing things up? Or better yet, not blow things up at all?

Of course, because the universe hates her, the ghast's eyes glow red as

it prepares to spit another fireball.

Pearl grits her teeth and brings her sword up, ready.

The ghast shoots. The fireball hurtles towards Pearl, ready to incinerate her.

Not yet…

Not yet…

Now!

Pearl swings her sword, *hard*, and knocks the fireball straight back at the ghast. It impacts, and with a death-cry, the ghast disintegrates into particles and exp.

Hold on. The ghast *isn't* particles and exp. It's particles, exp, and a *ghast tear*.

Pearl scoops up the item happily. It'll come in handy down the line, especially since she doesn't have a ghast farm.

Once the tear is safely tucked into Pearl's inventory, she heads over to the Nether fortress she'd been bridging towards in the first place.

Pearl takes in the tall, dark spires of the fortress. The Nether brick is as foreboding as always. Around the towers, bright sparks of orange hover — blazes. Pearl thinks she can see wither skeletons patrolling the bridges as well, but she can't tell against the dark Nether brick.

Pearl only has iron gear, with the exception of some diamond leggings from the ancient city. She doesn't have fire resistance or water bottles, either. The odds aren't in her favor.

Pearl huffs and raises her sword.

No way through it but to do it.

Pearl is scooping up a blaze rod when a cruelly-dull blade slams into her shoulder.

She hisses as she feels the wither effect creeping into her code. Already, it's eating into the little pool of energy that is her health.

The wither skeleton's face is nothing but apathetic.

Through the pain of the skeleton's poison, Pearl heaves her blade up and slams it into the creature's ribs. It's knocked back, but not enough to buy Pearl the breathing room she really wants.

Pearl grits her teeth and swings again. The skeleton is knocked back again, further this time, but it doesn't die.

Growling slightly, Pearl holds her blade ready.

The wither skeleton takes a step forward. Pearl jumps up, throwing her full body weight into a strike as she comes back down.

Critical hit.

The skeleton dies. In its place is exp and…

…a wither skull?

Carefully, Pearl grabs the rare drop. It's… extremely lucky, to get one so fast. Hopefully, it's a sign of things going well, and not an omen of doom.

(The skull's eyes are apathetic. In the strangest way, it feels foreboding.)

Chapter End Notes

Blitz day two, success!
Mandatory Discord Plug Here ^v^

Paranoia, Curiosity, and Buttons

Chapter Summary

> The title says it all, but in far vaguer terms than are generally accepted in a summary.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The government people have given Scott an iron hoe.

Honestly, he's not really sure why they'd waste iron on a hoe when wooden ones are just as fast. It's not like they're mining leaves or anything. They're just tilling farmland.

Absentmindedly, Scott tills a block. It automatically flattens out and becomes farmland.

A moment passes. Then, Scott realizes what he's done and mentally smacks himself.

These people literally have no magic. If he wants to blend in, he can't go around using magic to till farmland. He needs to wait and figure out how to do it the not-magic way.

On top of that, Scott has just undone whatever wonky slab-thing the people have placed/done to stop spawning. While Scott can probably handle whatever comes of that, it's bound to at least give someone a scare, if not severely injure them.

He can't even place a torch to stop the spawning because it would be too conspicuous!

He casts around his inventory for a solution. Maybe he can do a lantern? No, someone would probably move it, or ask where it came from.

All Scott really has in his inventory are his tools, some food, and some planks for building and such.

Wait a second…

Scott grabs his planks and crafts a button. Then, he places it on the

farm block.

There. Crisis averted.

“Smajor?”

Scott blinks and looks up at Lucille.

“You did that very fast.”

Scott stomps down on his wince. He has no reason to wince, because he is guilty of nothing. All potential mob spawnings have been dealt with.

(*What if there had been a creeper near the kids???*)

Lucille crouches down and starts manually taking seeds from her little bag and pressing them into the dirt around the wooden button.

Scott blinks. Based on what Lucille is doing, farming without magic means you don’t need the whole block clear to plant. He can put as many buttons down as he likes and it will still be fine.

Glancing around, Scott sees that in the time it took him to have a mild crisis, most of the other refugees have done about half of what he did in an instant. They’ll take ages this way. But maybe, if Scott is extra subtle, and makes sure to place buttons properly…

As nonchalantly as he can, Scott tills another patch of dirt. Then he puts a button down.

Lucille doesn’t look up from her planting.

…It can’t hurt to speed things along a bit, can it?

The tick Pearl was out of the Nether, she made a beeline for her house and crafted a brewing stand.

Now, she has it processing that ghast tear into potions of regeneration while she starts a nether wart farm.

It doesn’t take long for the farm to be up and running. Unlike a regular farm, Pearl doesn’t need to worry about hydrating farmland or tilling soil, so it’s extra quick.

Pearl has a few blocks of soul sand left in her inventory when it’s

done. They sit there innocently, right next to her wither skull.

Three skulls and some soul sand…

The part of Pearl's mind that's a hermit through-and-through is thinking of a beacon. Of fighting nobly, and reaping a good reward that she can turn into greater structures and bigger projects.

The part of Pearl's mind that remembers Last Life screams *last resort.* Says that maybe, if she's backed into a corner with no way out, she can at least bring her attackers down with her. Says that Lady Moon warned her that this world is dangerous, but Pearl can make something more dangerous if she has to.

Maybe it's just paranoia. Pearl is, after all, a highly-experienced player, and probably won't go down easily.

Maybe, it will be her salvation. Maybe it isn't paranoia if they're really out to get you.

(*Pearl leaves the skull and the sand in her inventory.*)

Armin struggles to drag his hoe through the cold dirt beneath him.

Off to his right, he notices that strange, tall man with the brightly-colored hair breezing through his work.

Armin grits his teeth. He needs to push through. Now is a terrible time to be weak, with a famine on and the harvest dependent on getting this land tilled properly.

Armin's arms shake a bit. He only pulls harder.

The hoe catches on something, and he almost overbalances. The only thing that keeps him from ending up on his butt in the dirt is a strong hand on his arm.

When Armin is no longer in danger of falling over, he looks up to thank his savior.

It's the man with the teal-and-red hair. He's staring down at Armin, like he's evaluating him.

It's more than a little unnerving. The man's height adds to the very intimidating picture. Consider the fact that he still hasn't taken his hand off of Armin's arm, and Armin is rapidly edging into 'scared'

territory.

Of course, that's not an excuse to shudder away like a shrinking violet. Armin needs to be polite. It'll keep him from making an enemy, if nothing else.

"Thank you," he offers.

The man tips his head. He seems to consider for a moment before replying.

"You're welcome."

Armin narrows his eyes.

The man speaks oddly. He has an accent, but it's not one he'd expect from a Maria refugee. If anything, it sounds like he's not quite sure how to speak, and is trying to emulate what's said around him without actually understanding how everything breaks down.

That's impossible though, right? If he can't speak, he would've been exempt from having to work, like the other people who weren't right in the head.

But then, why did he take so long to say "you're welcome?" It's not a hard phrase, and it's common enough that saying it should be instinct. Yet the man said it like he was trying out a new word. One he wasn't quite sure of the meaning of.

Armin's thoughts are interrupted when the man holds out some bread.

"…Huh?"

"You are… too small," the man proclaims.

(*And there's that weird pause again…*)

With a start, Armin realizes that this man is trying to feed him. …Does he really look so pathetic?

"No, I couldn't…"

The man just presses the food into Armin's hands.

"I don't even know you!" Armin insists.

"I'm Smajor."

Armin blinks, both at the odd name, and the strange pronunciation of “I’m.”

“I’m… Armin?”

“Armin,” the man repeats.

He nods, as if satisfied with the name. Then he shuffles back over to his row.

Armin stares after the man for a few moments longer.

That… was very strange.

(Armin thinks he can forgive the strangeness, though, when he splits his bread with Eren, Mikasa, and his grandfather.)

Chapter End Notes

> Armin my beloved, you're here! Puzzle out that blocky weirdo, you not-dumb blond!
> ~
> Blitz day three and we're still going strong ^v^
> *Vaguely threatens you with Discord link*

In Which the Author Starts Taking Her Crack Seriously

Chapter Summary

> You know, I've focused on Scott and Pearl a lot, but at the end of the day, this *is* an Attack on Titan fic...

Chapter Notes

> This is the final day of the update blitz! No more daily chapters after this, though I hope that what I have for you today gives you enough to think about until I get the next chapter out ^v^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Scott considers the kids.

He's only just thought of it now, but none of them are full-sized yet, even though it's been several months since he met them. When he'd first seen them, he'd assumed they were like baby mobs. He'd thought they would become adults fairly quickly.

But that hasn't happened. He knows it has nothing to do with their health — he'd been making sure they were fed, even as the government people started giving out less and less. Besides, Lucille would tell him if there was some weird nonmagic thing stopping their growth.

But what else could it be?

Maybe the cold? Powdered snow slows people down, so maybe the temperature would also slow the kids' growing down?

Scott sighs. That doesn't even make sense. Slowing down movement is completely different from slowing down growth. Plus, even if the cold was the reason, why hadn't they grown back in the city, before it got cold?

No, it wasn't the temperature.

Maybe there was some kind of condition they had to meet to grow? Like a certain achievement or something. One that all normal players have met by default. It would make sense: with all the chaos of that other wall going down, plus having to do the work the government

told them to, the kids wouldn't have had time to go fulfill that condition.

Huffing, Scott sets the thought aside and sneaks off to his wheat farm. He doesn't have time to worry about whether the kids are one block tall or two.

He has bread to make.

Pearl glances out from her protective ledge into a smooth, 10-block square room. No torches grace the area. There is only darkness. As she watches, that darkness is coalescing into all sorts of mobs beneath her ledge.

How long will it be, she wonders?

Every so long, Pearl grabs a bow and shoots down a few mobs to free up the mob cap. She needs things to keep spawning.

Several cycles of spawning and culling later, she sees what she was waiting for. A zombie villager. A farmer, by the looks of it, which is pretty good.

Pearl throws some torches up on the walls. This causes the spawning to stop in the pit below her. Once she's sure that there won't be a witch spontaneously appearing to ruin her day, Pearl picks off all the creepers and skeletons in the pit, until at last, only the zombie villager remains.

Pearl jumps from her ledge with the *crunch* of a half-heart lost to fall damage.

The zombie villager starts ambling towards her, but Pearl ignores it in favor of mining out the blocks concealing a hidden passage.

Pearl glances behind herself. The zombie villager is near, and looking positively murderous.

"Shall we, good sir?"

Without waiting for an answer, Pearl starts down the passage. The zombie villager follows after her.

One short walk later, the zombie villager is walking into an enclosure.

Pearl slams a fence-gate. The thing is trapped, now.

“Alright buddy, let’s get you healed up.”

Pearl grabs a splash potion of weakness from her inventory and chucks it at the zombie. It groans, but doesn’t really react much more than that.

Not that Pearl expected anything else. It’s a *mobile*, for Mojang’s sake. Honestly, that she bothered looking at its expression at all is a testament to how desperate she is for companionship.

(*She can’t even talk to the camera anymore-*)

Shaking herself out of her weird tangent, Pearl takes a golden apple from her inventory and uses it on the zombie villager.

It starts convulsing immediately.

Pearl wanders over to replant her wheat field while she waits for the de-zombification to complete. It takes a while, but she manages to use the seeds she gets to expand it a little bit.

She’ll need to expand it a lot more, come to think of it. With villagers in the mix, and possibly a full breeder setup in the future, Pearl is going to need a lot of bread.

“Hm?”

Pearl glances up. There, in the fenced-off enclosure, one brand-new farming villager is looking at her inquisitively.

“Well, let’s see what you’ve got to offer, shall we?”

Lucille has no idea how she and the kids all managed to scrape through winter.

Actually, that’s a lie. Lucille has a very good idea of what saved her and the kids, and its name is Smajor.

Honestly, Lucille has no idea how the man continues to find food. You’d think that being in the middle of nowhere during a famine would slow him down a bit. And to be fair, it had. For the first few days after they’d arrived, he’d been a bit more sparing with the food.

Then, like a switch had flipped, he’d been right back to shoving bread at them at every available opportunity. He even started adding in *chicken*, of all things, which is a luxury Lucille knows for a fact he can

neither afford, nor steal, considering how isolated they are.

Lucille sighs. That man gets stranger every day…

Looking up, she notices some commotion around the common area. There's a poster up. People seem to be gossiping about it a lot, though they don't seem too happy about it.

Curiously, Lucille wanders up to the poster to read it.

The floor seems to drop away beneath her.

By Order of His Royal Majesty the King:

Every citizen of Wall Maria over 16 years of age, and not being significantly impaired mentally or physically, shall report to the nearest military recruitment office or government official for enlistment in the infantry of the Mission to Retake Wall Maria.

Chapter End Notes

Yell at me here

Scott and Lucille, Part One

Chapter Summary

Conversations happen. Scott and Lucille react.

Chapter Notes

TW: Outdated terms for mental illness.
If you want to skip that, jump from "Lucille owes him that much" to "Smajor is pretty good at faking understanding though."

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lucille wants to throw up.

The king is sending them back? He wants them to fight those… those *monsters?* And the poster had said infantry… They won't even have horses to turn and retreat with.

Lucille's mind goes to the kids. They'll…

They'll be fine. They're smart. They'll work together, and they'll find a way to land on their feet. Plus, they've got…

Smajor.

Walls, what is Smajor even going to do? As grateful as Lucille is for his help, the man is at a major disadvantage. He'll die in moments.

Lucille scans the poster again, looking for some sort of out. There has to be some way to save Smajor. Lucille owes him that much.

Not significantly impaired mentally…

That could work. Smajor isn't dumb, but the army doesn't know that. They'll hear him talk and think he's wrong in the head.

Smajor is pretty good at faking understanding though… Lucille will have to get him on board with the charade. That shouldn't be a problem, though, if she frames it as being for the kids' sake.

Of course, that doesn't do anything for her, but… at least she has a shot at making it back.

(Lucille's hands shake behind her back.)

(*If she dies, the least she can do is die saving a friend.*)

"Smajor."

Scott looks up.

What follows is the worst conversation he's had the displeasure of holding on this server.

Scott is… a little nervous.

He gets it. The players here want to fight and take back their land. In their position, Scott would want the same thing. Wasn't he upset about being caged in just a few months ago? Didn't he want his own space to build and set up?

Scott understands all those urges.

He's still worried about Lucille.

It would be better, he thinks, if he could go with her. Unfortunately, Lucille said he can't. Apparently it's very important that the kids have someone with them — it's for their protection, Scott thinks.

Obviously, he's very honored that Lucille trusts him enough to look after them!

…But he's still worried about Lucille.

After all, hadn't she told him, all that time ago, that they hadn't been able to keep the mobs out when the outer wall was breached? If they couldn't handle one small hole in the wall, how could they expect to handle being surrounded on all sides?

Are they hoping to go during the day to avoid mobs? What will they do about the ones that don't burn, like creepers and witches? What about when they need to sleep? Is the other wall close enough to get there, repair it, and come back in a single day?

Somehow, Scott doubts that it is.

He's still worried about Lucille.

He has to stay, though. His friend trusts him to watch the odd, one-block-tall players that she calls "kids." Scott won't let her down.

That doesn't mean he's just letting her run off to fight mobs, though. He's the organizer of MCC, for Mojang's sake! He knows his way around a sword.

Lucille will too, by the time she leaves. Scott will make sure of it.

He'll make sure she's geared up properly, too. None of that two-iron-sword nonsense the soldiers here seem to like. No, if Lucille is going to go, she's going with the best enchanted netherite Scott can scrape together.

Honestly, it's probably overkill. The players here probably have some kind of plan to beat the mobs without needing magic. Scott should focus on expanding his wheat farm.

…He's still worried about Lucille.

Lucille sighs in relief as Smajor walks away.

She got him to stay.

Granted, she had to resort to some not-so-subtle manipulation to do it, but that's fine. Besides, it's not like she outright lied. The kids really do need someone to look after them. The fact that it also saves Smajor's life is just an added bonus.

And sure, it's a bit dishonest. But at the end of the day? Worth it. To save Smajor's life, it's worth it.

She got him to stay.

A tiny part of her wishes he'd protested a bit more.

She got him to stay.

Somehow, a part of her is crestfallen at that. She supposes that deep down, under all the pessimism that Wall Maria's fall had forced on her, she'd hoped that Smajor would have some sort of magical solution to everything. That he'd see death and respond with salvation, in the way he'd seen hunger and responded with bread.

But that's foolish. There's no easy way out of a military draft. Not for her, at least.

Lucille is going to be drafted by the military. She's going to be sent to re-take Wall Maria. She's going to die trying.

Smajor will mourn her. So will the kids, but they'll be taken care of. Smajor won't die so easily — Lucille has made sure of it.

She got him to stay.

Chapter End Notes

Casual reminder that I have a Discord server

Chores

Chapter Summary

Pearl does some chores around the base

Chapter Notes

This is a bit more of a relaxed chapter.
I mean, we can't have emotional miscommunications *every* chapter, can we?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Pearl places the last sign on her chore-board for the day.

She's got a lot to do. Some of it she'd normally be postponing for later, but she's speedrunning the setup right now. That means no procrastinating for poor, displaced, influencer-cleaning ladies.

Pearl huffs and turns to start.

No way through it but to do it.

Pearl breaks her fletching table and sets it down a couple blocks away.

A villager follows it blindly. So far, it's been pretty manageable, but Pearl is waiting for the other shoe to drop. Villagers don't just *behave* . Something is about to happen, she knows it.

As if on cue, the villager wanders off a ledge and into a two-block pit.

Several tries later, Pearl finally has two villagers positioned properly.

She steps back to check that everything looks right. She's replicated what she remembers of the combined villager breeder and iron farm Impulse made, but she's not sure whether she got everything right. She doesn't really do enough redstone to figure it out, either.

…Are those trapdoors on the wrong block?

Eh… It's probably fine.

Pearl just needs to get a zombie in. Then she'll know for sure whether

it works or not.

A few mishaps later, Pearl has a lovely iron farm going and some villagers to start trading with.

Next on Pearl's list of chores is a good long mining session.

Honestly, she probably should've done this *before* she went to the Nether. Iron isn't too bad, to be fair, but it pays to be cautious in a hardcore world. It only takes one good hit from a hoglin to end a series. Or in Pearl's case, to end her entirely.

At least she's doing it now.

Hopefully, by the time Pearl is done, she'll have a chestplate to go with her leggings. A pick would be good too. If she's extra lucky, she'll get full diamond tools and an enchanting table, but Pearl isn't holding out too much hope.

Deepslate just isn't that kind.

Pearl huffs as she equips her new diamond chestplate.

Her mining session had been very lucrative.

It had also been very boring.

After all that, Pearl needs some excitement. Something to get her creative juices flowing, or her adrenaline pumping. Something like a build. Or, perhaps, a fight.

She *has* been meaning to head back to the Nether…

Pearl grins, feral, as she cleaves another wither skeleton into particles.

She's been doing this for almost a rad-four* now, and she's gotten a solid handful of skulls for her effort. She's also gotten a chance to work out all her anxiety. There's nothing like slaughtering mobs for forgetting about the fact that you're trapped in a hardcore world with no admin tether to save you and no allies or friends to help you.

Pearl stabs another skeleton.

Yeah, this is what she needed.

Chapter End Notes

*For those of you wondering, a rad-four is a way Players measure time! The idea is that it's pi/4 radians around a clock, or 1/8th of a clock. That's about 3 hours, if you're wondering how the conversions work out.

If you want more fun lore-dumps like this, check out my Discord server ^v^

Sneaking and Banditry

Chapter Summary

Smajor sneaks around after dark.
This isn't really anything new, but this time he brings a friend.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Lucille likes to think she's a pretty understanding person.

Sure, she's not perfect. Nobody is. But, when push comes to shove, Lucille is pretty darn good at giving people the benefit of the doubt.

Case in point: When Smajor wakes her up in the middle of the night, she doesn't flip him off and roll over like she wants to. Instead, she gets up and pulls her shoes on to follow him, because she's the nicest person on the face of the earth.

However, even *her* patience has limits.

"Smajor, what's going on?"

"Practice."

Lucille is an understanding person. She is also a person who needs a lot more details than she currently has.

"Practice for what?" she asks, because she hasn't taught Smajor what 'what the heck' means yet.

"For going out… fighting."

Smajor turns towards the wall and swings an imaginary sword to help make his point.

Lucille only raises her eyebrows. Practice makes sense, if you tilt your head and squint, but… is it really going to make a difference? The titans are monsters, even for actual soldiers, and neither Lucille nor Smajor are actual soldiers. Any practice they do will be futile at best, and teach them bad habits at worst.

Then again… Lucille just told Smajor that she'd be going on a suicide mission. She manipulated him too, even if it was for his own good. If

this is what Smajor needs to cope, can she really deny him an hour of her time?

The answer is no. Besides, even if she had the right to refuse, she wouldn't. If these are her last nights on earth, she might as well spend them goofing off with Smajor a bit.

Smajor leads her past the sentries with a disturbing amount of ease.

Lucille has considered that he was a thief before, but she supposes she has proof now. She still has no idea *who* he's stealing from, but… well, she and the kids are fed. That's enough information for her.

Once they reach the forest, they walk for a long time. Smajor probably wants to make sure the sentries can't hear them. Which is fair, to be honest. Lucille isn't sure what they'll do if they think she and Smajor are trying to dodge the draft, but she also isn't sure she wants to find out.

They stop at a clearing. They're far enough from camp that they can't see the sentries anymore. The trees are thick here too, so even if someone comes looking, they'll probably have a chance to hide before they're spotted.

Smajor offers her one of two wooden swords — *where did he get those* — which Lucille takes easily.

Smajor, for his part, hefts his blade to a low ready position. It looks… a lot more practiced than she was expecting. Then again, if he really used to be a thief, he's probably been in a scrape or two. He might actually have experience on his side.

Why Smajor would remember that stuff instead of how to talk, Lucille will probably never understand, but for now, she won't look a gift horse in the mouth.

"So, how do you want to do this?" Lucille asks.

"You know how to use sword?"

"You just swing at what you want dead, right?"

Lucille swings her blade in a broad arc to demonstrate. Unfortunately, it's not up to standard. Not up to Smajor's standard, at least, if his head-shake is any indication.

“No. Do it like me.”

Smajor proceeds to demonstrate a swing. Unlike Lucille, who swung horizontally at waist-height, Smajor raises the sword up high and brings it down vertically in a precise arc that ends with the sword being pulled back to its ready position.

Lucille raises her eyebrows. The man’s movements were mechanical; smooth, in a way that screamed practice. If Lucille didn’t know better, she’d say she’s looking at a soldier. …But Smajor hadn’t been in uniform when Maria fell. He may be many things, but a soldier isn’t one of them.

Still. Lucille can’t help but wonder whether this practice is going to be more helpful than she’d planned on.

She raises her sword and brings it down, trying her best to mimic Smajor’s movement.

“No, not like that,” Smajor reprimands immediately. “Like this, see?”

He demonstrates again.

Lucille tries again, doing her best to mimic the maneuver, right down to the weird adjustment at the end that brings the blade back to the ready position.

It doesn’t go so well, if Smajor’s lack of reaction is anything to go by, but that’s alright. She has time to practice.

A lot of sword practice later, Lucille just about collapses into her mattress.

The sun will be rising in a few hours. Then she’ll have to go back to work in the fields, with only a short nap to bolster her strength.

Ugh.

Today’s going to be a long day…

At least Smajor will be suffering with her. Maybe he’ll even slow down enough for the rest of them to not get glared at by the supervisor for not keeping up…

Lucille glares at Smajor through the squinty little raccoon eyes she’d

acquired from her recent bout of sleep deprivation.

Has the man transcended the human need for sleep? Or has he just been without it for so long that he doesn't notice anymore? Can he share his secrets with Lucille so she doesn't keep nodding off while standing?

Abruptly, Lucille realizes she's staring. She blinks. In the space of that blink, her eyes somehow trick her into thinking that Smajor has instantly tilled a whole meter square of farmland in one motion.

Walls, she really needs some sleep…

Chapter End Notes

> Well... Lucille has certainly come to some conclusions.
> If you want to come laugh about how sus she thinks Smajor is, you can join my Discord here.
> (I promise the link works this time! Also, thanks to the commenter who told me it wasn't working! Html is hard, but I have now learned what *not* to do)
> Tilly next time ^v^

Projects

Chapter Summary

> Scott in the Nether, what's he gonna do~?
> Oh, also: new POV! Plus, Pearl starts work on a little personal project.

Chapter Notes

> It's the last day of my break TTvTT
> What better way to commemorate it than with a chapter, eh?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“No.”

That’s what Lucille said tonight when Scott tried to get her to come practice. She’d told him she wanted to sleep. Scott had tried to explain that phantoms wouldn’t spawn until she goes three nights without sleep, and that technically the counter had restarted last night since she’d slept the last rad-four before dawn, but she hadn’t believed him.

Or maybe Scott just said it wrong…

Regardless, Lucille made it very clear that she isn’t training tonight. This is somewhat concerning, since Lucille doesn’t know how to crit or use a shield yet and Scott doesn’t know how long he has, but it does present an opportunity.

Said opportunity is on the other side of the swirling purple portal that Scott has just constructed.

Based on what Scott has seen so far, iron swords are the norm for players going to fight mobs. It makes sense: iron is relatively easy to get, farmable, and can be repaired without much trouble. However, iron isn’t the strongest sword in the game. It’s not even the second-strongest.

Scott isn’t terribly interested in his friend going off to fight in second-rate gear. He’d rather see her off in first-rate gear — aka, enchanted netherite.

Hence the portal.

Thus far, Scott hasn't really bothered with the Nether. He didn't have a reason to. Besides, between getting set up and keeping his various friends fed, he hasn't exactly had time to poke around other dimensions.

Now, though… He has a motive and a free night. Perfect conditions for poking around the Nether for ancient debris.

When Scott steps through the portal, he doesn't bother looking around for fortresses or forests with a certain type of wood. He just starts mining a staircase down. After all, he only has one night to do this. He needs to make the time count.

He also needs to avoid getting shouted at for being late again…

He can deal with that later though. For now, he just needs to not blow himself up with his own beds.

Easy.

Lucille and Smajor are up to something.

Jamie doesn't *get* those two. He hasn't gotten them since Smajor caught him nicking and decided to give him precious food for his trouble. He still doesn't get them, now that Lucille checks if he and his friends are alright each day and Smajor makes sure they get something extra to eat at every turn.

Jamie doesn't have to understand them to recognize what they've done for him, though. And he doesn't have to understand them to be loyal.

"Where did the blue-haired guy go?" a blond kid asks one night.

Jamie shrugs.

"Probably went to use the toilet."

It's hours before Smajor and Lucille come home that night. When they finally do turn up, Lucille looks even more tired than usual, and Smajor looks… well, he looks the same as always, but that doesn't really mean much when it comes to Smajor.

Jamie doesn't bother mentioning any of this to the blond kid.

Pearl huffs as her boots crunch on gravel, then grass.

She can't live the rest of her life underground. Even if she wanted to — which she doesn't — she needs animals from the surface to progress. She needs cows for leather and books, chickens for feathers and arrows, and so on.

The problem there is the weird, modded not-zombies that crawl around the surface. Pearl doesn't know how they work. She doesn't know how to beat them, and she can't gamble her existence on being able to figure it out on the fly.

She can learn, though.

Pearl stares one of the not-zombies in the eye as it barrels towards her. It comes closer, closer, closer…

Now.

Pearl slams on the stone button next to her, and a piston fires. Signs are destroyed in a chain reaction. A vast gravel floor drops away, leaving the not-zombie to plummet down towards the floor of a cave Pearl had dug herself.

"Let's see what your deal is, huh?"

Chapter End Notes

> Pearl with a titan, what's she gonna do~?
> Theories can be shared in the comments or in the Discord!

KABOOM

Chapter Summary

Pearl with a titan, what's she gonna do~?

Chapter Notes

Holy fluff, I'm really popping off with these updates lately! I guess that's just what spring break does to a gal... Anyway, hope you enjoy ^v^

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The not-zombie is… strange.

It doesn't take damage like a normal mob. Instead, it cuts and bleeds, but no matter how many times Pearl stabs it, it doesn't dissolve into exp or items. It doesn't even stop moving.

Nothing is invincible though. Not unless it's in creative, and this is a survival server. Besides, it's not a player. Mobs can't go into creative.

So Pearl tries other things.

She burns the creature. Its flesh blackens and chars, but it keeps wriggling, and when the fire dies down its skin steams and goes back to its usual color.

Pearl tries to drown it. A rad-three later, she concludes that it can breathe underwater.

She douses the thing in potions. Finally, it reacts appropriately: the not-zombie shudders and convulses with poison, and when Pearl chucks a bottle of harming at it, it dies.

"So you're immune to physical damage, but magic kills you," she narrates to nobody. "I'd rather you were less expensive to kill… but I do live in a cave. Spider eyes aren't too hard to get."

Pearl will need to expand her nether wart farm if this is really the only way to kill them, though. She'll also need to spend a lot more time at the Nether fortress.

Then again, she was planning to do that anyway for wither skeleton

skulls. Killing whatever blazes she sees on the way shouldn't be too hard. If she sets up a few cauldrons throughout the fortress, it'll be even easier.

Still, she'd like to have some kind of alternate killing method. Potions are clunky at the best of times. If Pearl could at least get something stackable to use, she'd be a lot happier.

The part of Pearl's brain that has spent far too long around Grian screams "TNT."

Well, there's no harm in trying, is there?

KABOOM

Pearl hisses at the volume of the explosion.

Theoretically, a single block of TNT would have been enough to check whether her second not-zombie has blast resistance. But when the first block didn't work, Pearl's Grian-brain kicked in and said to use a *lot* of TNT, and Pearl… didn't tell it no.

That was all the Grian brain needed.

A quarter-stack of TNT later, Pearl has killed her second not-zombie. Apparently even they aren't immune to TNT overkill. Then again, who is?

Unfortunately, Pearl still doesn't have a solution to her practicality issues. TNT takes ages to detonate, and if she needs to place a lot of it to kill a single not-zombie, she'll have to dedicate half her inventory to TNT for short trips aboveground. Resources are an issue too. There isn't much sand nearby. That makes it even worse than the potions from a supply standpoint.

End crystals might be faster, but they still need sand for glass — and that's before you account for the obsidian, ghast tears, or eyes of ender.

Pearl sighs.

It looks like she's expanding her brewery…

KABOOM

Smajor mines past the block of cobble he'd used to shield himself from the explosion of the bed he'd just clicked.

He whistles appreciatively at the destruction. Right next to a newly-blasted waterfall of lava, two pieces of ancient debris sit, ready for collection.

This will bring Smajor's total up to five: plenty for a sword.

Chapter End Notes

OwO
The titans are vulnerable to potions... Why could that be?
Share your theories in my Discord! I promise it hasn't been taken over by two factions warring over whether pink is a color or not
^v^

Smajor Smiths a Smord- I Mean, Sword

Chapter Summary

> Smajor makes a sword! He also has a very interesting internal monlogue.

Chapter Notes

> This chapter was actually written live with a few of y'all watching! I'm not gonna lie: it was pretty nervewracking, but it was also a lot of fun getting to talk through my process and get feedback as I went.
> I might try the whole live-writing thing again, but until then, here's what got written!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Scott pulls two diamonds from his chest.

He already has a diamond sword. Theoretically, he's set until that sword breaks — which it won't do for a long time. It is diamond, after all, and he hasn't used it too much.

This sword isn't for him, though. It's for Lucille. Lucille, who doesn't have a sword, but is still going to be fighting monsters.

It's brave of her. Scott isn't sure he'd fight, if he was in her shoes. It's been so long since he was a new player, fighting mobs with nothing but his fists and bumbling around the dark because he didn't know he needed to light the area.

Lucille, though. She's charging ahead without a tool to her name except what the soldiers give her.

Well… whatever the soldiers give her, and some netherite from Scott himself.

He can't exactly let a friend go into battle unprepared, can he?

Scott steps over to the crafting table and interacts with it, using it to combine his diamonds with sticks. He has a shiny new sword in no time.

The sword is immaculate, and its durability is full. It practically begs

to be enchanted. Frankly, it deserves level three enchants, but Scott doesn't have the bookshelves for that. He'd barely managed to haggle a trade for the single book he needed to make his enchanting table. Fortunately, he'd had enough food spare to make the deal, but it had been a close thing.

Still worth it, though. Lucille will be far safer with enchanted netherite than with the iron toothpicks that the soldiers use.

Scott grabs his lapis and steps up to his enchanting table. Blade in hand, he interacts with the table, the familiar UI springing to life before his eyes to display enchantment options.

Knockback, unbreaking, and sharpness are listed out neatly in Stronghold Galactic.

Scott considers for a moment. Should he get sharpness for its versatility? Knockback so Lucille can keep monsters back? Or unbreaking, in case Lucille is gone longer than he expects and her sword loses a lot of durability?

It takes a few moments before Scott comes to his decision.

He'll go with sharpness. Lucille probably won't be gone long enough to need unbreaking, and knockback can throw you off if you haven't practiced using it.

Choice made, Scott selects sharpness from the list of options. His lapis vanishes, and a deep, resounding, chime-gong sort of sound reverberates through the room as the signature glow of an enchantment engulfs the sword.

[Diamond Sword]

> Sharpness I

> Unbreaking I

Scott jumps in both surprise and excitement when he sees the enchants. For a level one enchanting table, this is about the best result he could've gotten. It'll be perfect for a new player like Lucille.

Scott's next stop is at his smithing table.

He'd had to make it specifically for this, and his iron supply was hurting for it, but he didn't mind. He could always mine for more.

As gingerly as he can, Scott pulls out his netherite ingot. As far as he knows, it's the only one of its kind on the server. It's an advantage that nobody else has. It's an advantage that might keep Lucille alive.

Scott puts the blade and the ingot into the appropriate slots. An experience cost appears, but he barely looks at it. He knows he'll be willing to pay it.

The dull darkness of netherite creeps over the blade, only broken by the distinct sheen of enchantments.

It's a thing of beauty. The kind of weapon that would turn the tide of a battle in the Life Series or on an anarchy server. The kind of weapon that would save a player from a zombie horde or a creeper ambush.

The kind of weapon that would be *perfect* for Lucille.

Chapter End Notes

> Get notified if I write live again by joining my Discord!
>
> Something I forgot to mention in the chapter: Smajor actually renamed the sword to give it that extra-special touch. Any guesses what he called it?

Unexpected Depths

Chapter Summary

Our characters discover new things about the world and people around them.
...Those discoveries may not be entirely accurate.

Chapter Notes

Trigger Warnings:
- Morbid humor (skip line 5 and parts of scene 3, marked with *)
- Self-deprecation (scene 3, paragraph marked with ⁺)
- Discussion of a government draft and draft-dodging (skip from Armin saying "Maria reclamation mission" to "Armin sighs and leans his head back onto his knees." The tune-back-in line is marked with @)
- Reference to psychological effects of food insecurity (scene 3, paragraph marked with &)

~

Stay safe ^v^
(Also, if I missed a warning, let me know and I'll add it!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lucille takes a deep breath to fortify herself.

It's been a few days since her first, sleep-deprivation-inducing training with Smajor. She's recovered. …Mostly.

Now, she's going to throw all that recovery down the drain to practice hitting a tree with a sword.

Ugh.

*Why can't her last month of life be *nice* and *relaxing* ?

It's a silly question, she supposes. Nothing is ever relaxing with Smajor. Sure, he's nice, and the general aura of weirdness that he exudes gives her plenty to think about, but he's definitely not relaxing.

Unfortunately, Lucille has managed to become friends with this wacky man, which means that if it makes him feel better, she will sacrifice

some of her sleep to train for a fight she can't win.

Stupid friendship…

Just like last time, Smajor hands her a wooden sword to practice with. Unlike last time, however, he also grabs a huge, rectangular shield and foists it on her.

Lucille raises her eyebrows. This is… very weird. Soldiers haven't used shields in ages, and thieves don't either. The only time Lucille has even seen a shield was on a statue of one of the goddesses.

Was Smajor some kind of priest before he lost his memory? One that trained himself to fight as the goddesses would?

It's as good an explanation as any… But if Smajor remembers how to fight, wouldn't he remember his religion too? Wouldn't he pray and make offerings somewhere Lucille could see or hear?

Smajor starts explaining how to use a shield, temporarily pulling Lucille's attention away from his past. Apparently the goal is to cover as much of your body as you can if you're being shot, and to take the strike if you're being hit with a sword.

Lucille gets the joy of being whacked with a sword by her only friend as a means of practice.

The first strike rattles her bones. She's going to feel that in her shoulder tomorrow, she can tell.

Lucille makes steady progress over the next hour. She figures out how to move her shoulder with the momentum, making it hurt less without letting the blade touch her. She even brings her blade up like she might to counterattack one time, though she stops before actually reaching Smajor — she doesn't want to hurt him.

After that, they take a break.

"By the way…" Lucille begins, waiting for Smajor to glance over before she continues. "Why are we using shields?"

"For going to fight outside of walls?"

Smajor's face doesn't change. It never does. Even so, when he speaks, Lucille thinks she can hear confusion in his tone.

"Yeah, I know that's what we're practicing for, but the soldiers don't

normally use shields."

Lucille takes a moment to be proud of Smajor for not immediately asking for clarification. He's come a long way from not knowing the word for "night."

"Why not?" Smajor asks.

Lucille pauses. She'd always assumed that Smajor was a Maria refugee, but if he's asking that question, then he didn't see a titan… Or maybe he just lost his memory after the fact? Regardless, she'd been assuming that he knew what she'd be dealing with.

Apparently she shouldn't have assumed.

"The titans would just… break the shields."

Smajor's face still doesn't change. If Lucille wasn't used to it, she might be worried, but she is, so she just gives Smajor time to process.

"There's no use practicing with them more then."

Lucille nods, and they go back to practice.

Once Lucille leaves to go to bed for the night, Scott heads to his little bunker and paces.

Lucille said the mobs here break shields. The only way to consistently disable a shield is with an axe. The only vanilla Overworld mobs that consistently spawn with axes are Pillagers, which, while annoying to deal with, are pretty rare. Too rare to conceivably keep all these players inside the walls.

It would make sense if it were the other way around — if there was a walled-off area where nobody was allowed to go for fear of a woodland mansion or an outpost — but it's not. Lucille acted like the whole world is crawling with axe-wielding mobs, and the walls are the only thing keeping them back.

…She's probably right. She's lived on this server for far longer than Smajor has, after all.

But that has *implications* . Either the pillager spawning is glitched to insane levels, or the server is modded.

Is it even possible for the server to be modded? Only the admin can

implement serverside mods like that, and as far as he can tell, this world doesn't have an admin yet. At least, not one that the players are aware of.

But how else could there be so many axe mobs?

…But why would the admin want to flood the world with pillagers?

Unless… is it possible for admins to change spawn conditions accidentally? Did some hapless admin with no idea what they were doing accidentally up the pillager rates to something so outrageous that players had to build walls and spawnproof their entire territory just to live?

…Scott hates how much sense it makes. In a server like this one, where nobody seems to know how to play the game properly, he can easily see a new admin getting in over their head. He can see the players not being able to handle the sudden mob spike, and frantically building themselves the best solution they could manage. Void, he can even see the mobs being so overwhelming that a decent-sized hole in the wall requires a massive evacuation to get away from the flood of pillagers.

Scott could probably manage, with prep time. He's been playing for ages. A little extra difficulty would be manageable, if not necessarily fun.

For Lucille, though… Well, Scott certainly has his work cut out for him.

Holy Mojang though. A modded server full of axe-wielding mobs? His luck is the *worst* .

Armin holds his hand to his mouth, desperately trying to cover the sound of his sniffles.

His grandpa is getting sent out soon. His grandpa is getting sent to *die* soon. Then it'll be just him, alone with Eren and Mikasa, with no way to support himself or his friends.

If they're lucky, Eren or Mikasa will be able to get some kind of physical job that the two of them can use to get by. If they're not… Well, they'll have to cross that bridge when they come to it.

+Armin feels sticky, wet tears rolling down his face. *Walls,* he's

pathetic. His grandpa is going out of the walls to fight for their home, Eren is planning to follow, and all Armin can do is *sit here* and *cry* .

“Is someone down here?”

Armin hiccups before he can stop himself, the noise echoing down the walls of the alleyway he’d chosen for his cry-fest. He keeps quiet anyway, though. Maybe whoever is there will go away…

Unfortunately for Armin, the Walls aren’t feeling merciful today, so steps echo around him as the person comes down the alleyway.

It’s a kid, he realizes. Probably around his age. He has light brown hair that’s grown down to his chin, and he seems a bit better-fed than most of the other refugee kids. A citizen of Wall Rose, maybe?

“You alright?” the kid asks.

Armin opens his mouth to answer, but is cut off by his own sniffling.

“...I’ll take that as a no, then.”

Armin hiccups something that might have been a laugh if his throat wasn’t clogged with phlegm.

The kid seems unsure of what to do, hovering awkwardly near Armin and occasionally glancing towards the mouth of the alleyway. Armin doesn’t bother trying to reassure him. He just keeps crying into his knees.

Eventually, the kid seems to gather his courage and steps closer.

“...Wanna share what’s makin’ you cry like this? You don’t have to, but… I guess it might help?”

Armin hiccup-laughs again.

“Maria reclamation mission,” he manages to croak out.

*Honestly, he doesn’t need to be spilling his troubles to this random kid… but what’s the worst that could happen? His grandpa is already dead, it’s not like anyone can do much worse than that to him.

The kid winces.

“Yeah, that’ll do it. My…” the kid stumbles a bit, like he’s looking for a word he doesn’t have. “Someone I know got drafted for that too. Not

exactly good odds, is it?"

Armin snorts.

"Bad odds, a government-sponsored massacre… whatever you want to call it."

"…For the sake of not getting beat by a soldier, I'll go ahead and call it bad odds."

"I guess I can't fault you for that."

They both go silent again. This time, though, there's far less awkward shuffling from the kid.

"You said it's your grandpa that got drafted?" the kid asks abruptly.

Armin blinks, but nods.

"You might be able to get him an exception. Someone I know got out for not being able to talk right."

"The soldiers let him off for that!?"

"Yeah," the kid confirms, nodding. "Guy got hit upside the head when Maria fell and forgot how to talk. We've been teachin' him again, but it's still bad enough to be a dodge."

Armin hums.

"My grandpa can still talk though. And at this point, enough people have tried injuring themselves that the soldiers would be able to tell it's a dodge."

"…Ah."

@Armin sighs and leans his head back onto his knees. At least he's not crying anymore, even if the situation hasn't changed.

Bop.

Armin startles as he feels something tap against his face. He scrambles back, distantly worried that he's being mugged — not that he has anything to steal — only to see the kid holding out half a loaf of bread.

Armin blinks.

“Here,” the kid murmurs. “I know it doesn’t fix anything, but at least you’ll have something in your stomach, yeah?”

&Tentatively, Armin reaches out to accept the food. His time as a refugee urges him to grab it fast, to eat it before it gets stolen, but his grandpa taught him manners. If this kid is going to be this generous in the middle of a famine, Armin can at least accept his kindness with grace.

The kid sits down next to Armin as he begins nibbling on the bread.

“So, you got a name? Or do I just call you kid-who’s-crying-over-his-grandpa?”

Armin blushes, embarrassed.

“Uh, I’m Armin.”

“Well, hi Armin! My name’s Jamie. I’m from Waterby — mill town a bit south of Trost. You?”

“...Shiganshina.”

Jamie’s eyebrows raise.

“Wow. That must’ve been fun.”

Armin snorts.

“Not really.”

Chapter End Notes

> Lucille and Scott have come to some very wrong conclusions, but at least Armin and Jamie are friends now!
> If you want to chat about anything in the chapter, you can do so in my Discord server.

Weapons

Chapter Summary

Two very cool ladies get themselves some very cool weapons.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Pearl carefully arranges her water bottles in a chest.

She doesn't have much sand, and bottles can't be reused once they're made into splash potions, but with piglin trades she can always get more of them. Spider eyes are almost *too* easy to get when living in a cave. Mushrooms aren't hard to find either.

Sugar was a little rough, but she'd managed to scrounge a bit from an abandoned house when she went up to trap her not-zombies. Once she has her first batch of potions made, she'll be able to explore, find some sugarcane, and get a proper farm set up.

Then she'll be unstoppable.

Bottles organized, Pearl steps over to her nether wart farm and harvests her crop. The yield goes into a separate barrel, with the exception of one piece, which she puts into her brewing stand alongside some blaze powder.

She hums as the nether wart infuses into water.

Redstone and glowstone for strengthening her potions aren't problems either. Pearl lives deep enough, and spends enough time in the Nether, that she has plenty of both. Besides, she's not exactly using the redstone for anything else. That's not how she plays the game.

Once the awkward potions are finished, Pearl adds a spider eye to the mix.

Sinister green takes over the bottles. Poison. The not-zombies won't be having much fun fighting her now. Players will probably think twice too, if it comes to that.

Pearl scoops redstone, glowstone, and gunpowder into the brewing stand in turn. Her potion now is stronger, now, and it'll last longer.

She can throw it too.

It's a proper weapon.

The not-zombies had writhed and stopped moving towards her when hit by poison. It'll only actually take them down to half a heart, but if Pearl can get a few minutes to move around unhindered, she can easily leave them in the dust.

And if she can't… Well, that's what splash harming is for.

"You're sure I should stay with kids?"

"Yes," Lucille affirms, swinging her blade in another practice arc. She's worked too hard to make sure Smajor survives this. Her work won't go to waste now, the night before she leaves. Not when she's so close to achieving her goal.

Smajor hums.

"Try jumping and swinging."

Lucille raises an eyebrow. Smajor catches her eye and does a little hop, swinging his blade as he falls back to earth.

"Like that. It hurts more."

That… seems feasible. Between gravity and the swing, Smajor's strike would probably hurt a lot. Lucille isn't sure whether she has the leg strength for that though…

But there's no harm in trying, is there?

Lucille crouches, preparing, then jumps and swings her blade around and down.

"Too slow," Smajor rebukes the moment her feet touch the ground. "You need to swing blade faster."

They keep practicing. Lucille tries to swing her sword faster for *ages* before eventually modifying the move so that her blade is already raised when she jumps. Smajor doesn't seem too happy with the change, but it works, so they go with it.

Unfortunately for Lucille's life expectancy, she can't keep practicing forever. She has to go to bed, so she can be up early, so she can

respond to the draft, so she can fight a battle she won't come back from.

Walls, she isn't ready for this…

"We should get to bed," she says, in spite of the instincts screaming to make the most of her last night of freedom. "Gotta be up early for the draft, yeah?"

"You're going tomorrow?"

Smajor's face still has the hauntingly blank expression it always does, but he sounds surprised. Come to think of it, Lucille never said when she was being deployed, did she? Maybe he'd thought there was actually enough time to train her…

Well, there's no use dragging the pretense out any longer.

"Yeah. We're all leaving bright and early."

Smajor hums.

Lucille hands her wooden training sword back, just like she always does, and isn't that strange? She's been sneaking out to practice for so long that the phrase "always does" is the first thing to come to her mind, without so much as an awkward pause where she's unsure what to do.

…Lucille doesn't think she regrets this becoming an "always does." Strange as he is, Lucille enjoys Smajor's company, and she treasures the pinprick of hope these practice sessions have given her.

If this is the "always did" that Smajor remembers her by, she thinks she'll be okay with that.

"Lucille?"

Lucille glances up to see Smajor holding a sword out to her, the way he always does before practice.

The "always does" stops before Lucille has time to think on it more, though. Unlike normal, this is the end of practice, and the sword is most definitely *not* meant for training. Instead of a wooden stick with a hilt, it's sleek and glossy and *metal*, like the swords the soldiers have, but darker and heftier.

Smajor is holding it out to her hilt-first.

Lucille is hyper-aware of her own eyebrows shooting up in shock as she looks at the sword.

“Smajor? *Where did you get this!?*”

“Secret,” he laughs, like it’s completely normal to pull a one-of-a-kind sword out of nowhere.

This does nothing to reassure Lucille.

“You can’t just steal something like this!” she hisses, because how else could Smajor have gotten this? “It’ll be noticed missing!”

“I didn’t steal,” Smajor explains, still sounding amused. “It’s mine. But now it’s yours. For fighting titans, yeah?”

Lucille blinks.

“Oh…” she murmurs. “Oh, no, I can’t just take this! It’s yours.”

Smajor shrugs and holds the hilt closer to her.

“It’s fine. I don’t need sword right now, but you do.”

“I…” Lucille begins, not quite sure how to decline this politely. “...You’re sure you don’t want it?”

Smajor shrugs again.

“There are others like it. It’s yours.”

Lucille gulps. She doesn’t know much about swords, but she’s seen a good couple, and she knows that the only way a sword has an edge as clean as this one does is if it’s taken care of regularly. Smajor obviously puts a lot of work into keeping this blade sharp… But he’s giving it to Lucille.

Gingerly, she reaches out to take the handle. The hilt is warm in her grip. She gets the odd sense that, somewhere beneath the surface, there’s something *moving* within the blade, almost like it’s *breathing* or *flowing* somehow…

But that’s impossible, so she dismisses the thought.

“I’ll take good care of it,” she promises.

Even if it’s the last thing I do.

Chapter End Notes

Lucille, sweetie, that's magic, not your imagination.
If you wanna chat about the implications of Lucille having a netherite sword, or even just wanna vibe with some other fans, you're welcome to join my Discord server ^v^

PS anyone notice Smajor fibbing about not needing a sword? I mean, all the bone meal he goes through making bread has to come from *somewhere*...

A Draft and an Idea

Chapter Summary

> Lucille gets drafted, Armin does a social anxiety speedrun(Any%), and Smajor picks a coping mechanism to use while his friend is away.
> Also the author introduces cameo characters because *why not*.

Chapter Notes

> Hello all! It's been a while, but I come to you with the chunkiest chapter yet as recompense.
> Seriously, this is almost three thousand words. That's like, triple the fic average. We also have a super broad range of perspectives, which is fun, but also a little odd because I usually try to cut chapters off after a maximum of two perspectives, so we'll see how that goes...
>
> Also:
> **Trigger Warning!**
> There's discussion of a military draft, discussion of attitudes surrounding one's own death, & a brief mention of draft dodging in this chapter! If that's not your cup of tea, skip scenes one and three, and skip any block-quoted areas in the rest of the fic. I'll include a summary in the end notes so you don't miss anything.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lucille barely manages to heave herself out of bed in time for the draft.

The thing about forgoing sleep to train to fight titans is that you forgo sleep. Well, *duh*, but sleep-deprivation is seriously not fun. It makes you tired and snippy and altogether not-fun to be around, which is not good when you're trying to absorb enough skill from a random soldier's pep talk to not die to a giant monster.

The very eye-catching sword she now has to lug around doesn't help matters either. Make no mistake: she's very glad to have it. She respects the effort Smajor put into taking care of it and she's strangely comforted to have a weapon in her hand, but it draws a lot of attention that Lucille is too tired to deal with, especially this early in the morning.

Walls, she wants to go back to bed…

“Maria folks, over here!”

Lucille rolls her eyes. “Maria folks?” This person could at least *pretend* this is meant to be a draft and not a poorly-disguised attempt at population control.

Regardless, Lucille has to listen, so she wanders over towards the woman in the Survey Corps uniform that’s shouting for the attention of the refugee camp. She gets even more odd looks as she does.

The sword isn’t that noticeable, is it?

The soldier directs them to covered wagons, which are apparently meant to take them to a “three-day intensive training camp” to prepare them to fight titans. They’ll also get weapons there, though the soldier had made a rather pointed comment about “some of you not needing them” while looking at Lucille’s sword, so she might be exempt from that.

Lucille isn’t sure how she feels about that, honestly. On one hand, she’s glad that nobody seems to be trying to stop her from using the sword, but on the other, the soldiers choosing not to give one of them a sword under *any* circumstances doesn’t sit right with her.

Not that there’s anything she can do about it. If she could do anything about any of this, she would’ve done it already. She *had* done it already, for Smajor’s sake.

Lucille trundles her way into a wagon and sits down beside four other adult refugees.

“Welcome to wagon number five!” one of the refugees says, smiling wanly against the gloomy atmosphere. “My name’s Menn. They/them pronouns would be nice. You?”

“Lucille.”

Menn hums.

“Lovely name. Out of curiosity, what’s with the sword?”

Lucille pauses. She… probably should’ve come up with a cover story in advance. In her own defense, though, she was *tired*.

“…It’s a family heirloom.”

Menn doesn't look like they believe her, but they don't ask further questions. Lucille takes that as a win.

"...Ah. Well, hopefully that family heirloom works against titans!"

"You're awfully chipper."

Menn's face falls immediately. A moment passes, and they sigh, sounding like the kind of tired Lucille can relate to.

"...My kids are outside," they whisper. "Don't want to scare them."

Lucille hums.

"Tell me about it."

Menn's eyebrows raise. Apparently they're surprised, though Lucille isn't sure why.

"Aren't you a bit young to have kids?"

Oh. That's why Menn is surprised.

"Well, uh, they're not exactly *mine*. I just kinda try to take care of them, yeah?"

"Ah. Well, I hope they do well."

Lucille hums in agreement. It's a very kind way of saying, "I hope they manage after your death," but Lucille appreciates the sentiment.

"Same to yours," she offers.

The wagons trundle along until midday, when they're ushered out into a field with some small, hastily-constructed barracks off to the side.

The soldier who had come to collect them directs them all to stand in a line. Menn stands right next to Lucille, almost close enough to be touching, but Lucille lets them stay. They can both use the comfort, she thinks.

"I!" the officer bellows, "am officer Katherine Fay! It is my job to whip you into shape, and then *personally* lead you through the most terrible place you'll ever step: outside the walls!"

…Is this woman implying that she'll be coming out to fight with

them? Lucille supposes it makes sense to have their commander be the one to train them, but a very cynical part of her hadn't expected the effort. She'd sort of thought that they'd all be shoved out of the gate at Trost and left to fend for themselves as best they could with the weapons they were given.

Lucille won't complain about some extra help, though. Don't the scouts fight titans all the time? This lady has *got* to know what she's doing…

"Ladies will be in the barracks to your right, and gentlemen will be to the left.

Eh-hem.

Lucille hears Menn cough in a way that distinctly says, *"I'm coughing for attention, not any other reason."*

Officer Fay does not seem amused by the Attention Cough. She keeps talking, apparently uninterested in whatever Menn has to say.

"Drop your stuff and meet back here in ten minutes for the beginning of combat training."

Eh-HEM!

"You got something to say?" Officer Fay snaps, visibly annoyed.

Menn doesn't seem phased by the officer's glare, which is more than Lucille can say for herself.

"What if we're not a lady or a gentleman?" they ask.

"Pick whichever barrack calls to you or whatever. I don't care."

Menn nods, still looking unphased. Lucille has to give it to them: they don't scare easily. Hopefully that courage holds outside the walls…

"Hey," they mutter. "You cool with a bunkmate?"

Lucille shrugs.

"I don't see why not."

Menn grins, wide and enthusiastic in a way that's not quite genuine, but is as close as it'll get three days before death.

Lucille smiles back.

“You seem pretty comfortable with this whole thing.”

“Hmm?” Menn asks, shoving their single change of clothes under the bunk bed they’d picked to share.

“The whole, ‘government sending us to die’ thing. You don’t seem very worried.”

Menn stops their adjusting to look up at Lucille. They’re silent for a long moment. Honestly, it makes Lucille a bit uncomfortable, but she doesn’t know how to break the silence, so she doesn’t.

Honestly, she probably shouldn’t have said anything in the first place… But how could she not, with her impending doom corrupting every thought she has? When all she wants to do in her final moments is learn how to be as unbothered as Menn seems to be?

Eventually, Menn sighs.

“It has to happen, doesn’t it?”

“...Huh?”

“It has to happen. Some people have to die. There’s not enough food for everyone.”

Menn stands up and faces Lucille head-on.

“Some people have to die,” they repeat, “and I’d rather it be me than my kids. And I’d rather my kids remember me as brave than as terrified, and I’d rather spend my last moments living as I am than in fear.”

Menn holds solid eye contact while Lucille processes.

…She thinks she can understand where Menn is coming from. After all, hadn’t she just made that same decision? Hadn’t she looked at Smajor and decided to do what she had to do so he’d be safe? Hadn’t she considered running and decided to face her fate so the kids wouldn’t be targeted for information about the newest deserter?

“You’re being far braver than I am about it,” she offers.

Menn chuckles.

“Only on the outside,” they say. “Now, what do you say we get moving? I don’t want to annoy that officer chick before she teaches me how to kill titans.”

Despite the grim situation, Lucille laughs too.

“Sounds like a plan.”

“Hey! Sad kid!”

Armin startles and glances around, not sure who’s being called for. It can’t be him, right…? Or maybe it could… But most kids are pretty sad nowadays, so it could really be anyone.

Himself included.

But are they calling for him? Mikasa and Eren are right next to him, and they’re the only ones who ever try to get his attention…

“Oi!”

This time, Armin sees the speaker. It’s a kid with chin-length hair. In fact, it’s a kid with *familiar* chin-length hair.

It’s Jamie.

…Is Armin the sad kid?

Jamie strolls up to Armin, looking at him expectantly.

…Armin is definitely the sad kid. *Walls*, of all the times to meet someone, did it have to be when he was having a sobbing breakdown?

“...Hi Jamie,” he says, because he has *no idea what else to say*.

Eren and Mikasa are looking at him weirdly. They’re probably confused that Armin didn’t mention knowing Jamie… In his own defense, though, it was a very awkward meeting. He didn’t really want to relive it.

Jamie might not give him a choice about that…

> “Is your grandpa all loaded up? Or did he get out?”
>
> “...He’s gone with the other draftees,” Armin manages to grit out through sheer social conditioning. “What about your friend?”

"She's gone. Smajor is still around, though. It's a clean dodge."

"Your friend?" Armin asks.

Jamie nods. Armin hums in recognition and tries not to wonder whether he could've gotten his grandpa out of the draft if he'd done something different.

"That's lucky. I guess you're staying with him, then?"

Jamie shrugs.

"Not sure yet. We're all kinda figuring stuff out, I think."

Armin nods. Right as he does so, Eren steps forward, with a look in his eye that Armin knows far too well.

Walls grant me mercy…

"Sorry," he says, sounding distinctly not-sorry. "Who are you? And how do you know Armin?"

Jamie's eyebrows raise. He doesn't seem too bothered, but he doesn't seem keen on Eren's aggressiveness either. Dear *Sina…* Armin needs to de-escalate this, doesn't he?

"I'm Jamie," Jamie says, and Armin thanks every higher power he knows of that things haven't gone straight to violence like they do so often when Eren is involved.

"I ran into this one—" Jamie gestures to Armin "—and he seemed hungry, so I got something sorted for him. We're friends now."

Armin takes back all of his thanks. Feeding someone in the middle of a famine just *screams* closeness, and Armin doesn't think Eren will interpret that positively. Between the food and not being told about the meeting, he'll probably think Jamie is trying to steal Armin's friendship or something equally juvenile.

Sweet Sina, why is this his life?

"That's awfully kind of you," Mikasa cuts in, monotone, and *shit*, she thinks he's being taken advantage of somehow, doesn't she?

Jamie grins.

…He's not going to make this situation better, is he?

“Thanks. I do my best.”

Mikasa doesn’t look very satisfied with that answer. Neither does Eren. Jamie just makes solid eye contact, almost daring them to try something.

What have I done to deserve this?

“So, your friend is doing well?” Armin almost-shouts before Jamie, Eren, and Mikasa can start antagonizing each other properly.

Everyone turns to look at him. Armin abruptly wishes the ground would open up and swallow him whole. Unfortunately for him, the ground isn’t feeling merciful, so he has to deal with this.

“…Yeah,” Jamie responds. “You should stop by and meet him sometime, if you like.”

“Actually, we’ve got something we have to get to…” Eren says, employing the closest thing to subtlety he has.

(Eren is very obviously glaring at Armin and gesturing for him to come along. Armin is embarrassed to admit that this is an improvement.)

Jamie looks like he’s about to start poking holes in Eren’s very flimsy excuse. Armin isn’t sure he wants to see that.

“You and Mikasa can take care of that, and I’ll meet up with you later tonight. How does that sound?”

Everyone is staring at him again. Armin prays to the goddesses that nobody argues.

“…Be safe,” Mikasa offers.

Armin nearly sighs in relief.

“Well, follow me then.”

Jamie strides off, and Armin scurries after him. He can feel Eren’s glare on him as he tries to keep up.

That’ll be fun to deal with later…

Scott is nervous.

Lucille is gone. Scott stayed with the kids instead of following. There's no going back now: even if he changes his mind about following, he doesn't know where Lucille is going. He can't go after her.

All he can do is wait.

"Mr. Smajor?"

Scott shakes his nerves off and faces one of the kids. Interestingly, they've brought someone new along. It's another half-tall player, this one with blue eyes and a blond bowl-cut.

"Yeah?"

"This is Armin," Jamie introduces. "He's my new friend."

The new kid's — Armin's — eyebrows go up a little. …That's a sign of surprise here, right? Why these people chose something as labor-intensive as changing their skins every time they wanted to show emotion, Scott will never understand, but at least it makes them easy to read.

"Hello Armin," Scott says, because his Among Us training has taught him to talk and psychoanalyze at the same time.

"Hello Mr. Smajor."

Scott forcibly shifts his skin to something with a smile. It's a lot of effort, especially when he's going to change his expression right back in a minute, but the players here do it, so he tries to accommodate.

"...How did you and Jamie meet?" he asks, because he wouldn't have become as popular as he is if he couldn't keep a conversation moving. (Also because he's curious, but that wrecks the whole "suave and calculated" vibe he has in his head, so he's just going to ignore that.)

"Ah…" Armin starts, and Scott can *hear* the awkward strain in his voice. "Jamie just sort of… ran into me. We got talking and became friends."

There is definitely more to the story than that. If that story is legitimate, Scott will never play another round of Among Us in his life, and he likes Among Us way too much to quit.

Scott won't push, though. He has too many secrets of his own to go poking into other people's business. (...Unless it distracts said people

from his own secrets, but that's not the point)

"Well, it's always good to have another friend," Scott offers awkwardly, because he doesn't really have the context he needs to bring up a new topic naturally. Maybe Armin will have a question for him, though…?

Speaking of Armin, the kid seems to be staring a bit at something above Scott… or maybe just at Scott's hair?

"Is there something interesting up there?"

Armin startles a bit, almost jumping like a normal player would to show their surprise. Interesting…

"Sorry?"

"You're staring," Scott explains.

"Oh! Sorry, I just haven't seen anyone with hair that color before…"

"Quite striking, isn't it?" Scott asks, proud. "I've been told it fits my personality."

"Ah. Well, it certainly stands out."

Scott hums. Then, after a moment of consideration, he looks to Jamie.

"By the way," he checks, "have you eaten yet today?"

Jamie shakes his head — something that means the same thing here as in the rest of the servers, thank Mojang.

Scott grabs a loaf of bread from his inventory and holds it out.

"Here."

Jamie takes the bread and starts munching.

"...Where did you get that?" Armin asks.

Scott chuckles. New person, new questions — this time, though, he doesn't have to be as careful, because he has other players who will vouch for his relative normality. That is to say, he can gaslight as necessary.

"That's a secret," he says, because the vaguer your explanation, the

more wiggle room you have later.

Armin's eyes narrow — is that skepticism?

"You weren't carrying anything, and you don't have anywhere to hide something under a light shirt or in pants without pockets."

Scott just hums.

"Quite the mystery, isn't it?"

Armin looks a little annoyed now. That's fine, though — there's not much the kid can do about it without some kind of theory or evidence, and nobody here has inventories to provide a framework for any guesses he makes.

It's odd, how easy it is to get away with doing something when nobody knows they're supposed to be watching for that something…

Armin is glancing between Scott and Jamie's bread now, obviously trying to put things together.

"…The bread is fresh too. Did you make it?"

If Scott was native to this server, he'd be raising his eyebrows in shock right now. These people can tell who made things?

He can't deny it, at any rate. If Armin *does* have proof that he made the bread, lying now will bring everything else he says into question, and that's very bad when one is hiding the existence of other servers to avoid breaking galactic law.

"I did," Scott agrees, making sure to keep his voice as light and teasing as it was before so he doesn't let on how surprised he is by Armin's deduction.

Armin narrows his eyes again. He seems to be thinking, if his silence is anything to go by.

Don't ask more questions, don't ask more questions, don't ask more questions-

"Are you a baker, then?"

"…Hmm?"

"Do you sell the bread you make?"

Scott blinks. Selling things. Shops. Right.

“...I don’t, but I’m thinking about it now that you’ve mentioned it.”

Armin blinks. Jamie gives him a strange look.

Scott considers which colors he’d prefer for the roof. Should he do warped and crimson wood like he did in Chromia? Or should he go for something more low-key to fit the rest of this server?

…Colors are better for business. They draw more attention.

Plus, a nice bustling shop will give him something to show off to Lucille when she gets back.

It’ll give him something to do while he waits.

Something to do while *all he can do is wait.*

“What do you two think I should name the bakery?”

Chapter End Notes

And that's a wrap!
If there's anything in this mega-chapter you'd like to discuss, you can do that in my Discord, or you can leave your thoughts in a comment and I'll respond to you when I can.
Anyway, see you in the next update~ ^v^

Summary for Skipped Scenes & Lines:
Lucille gets drafted and makes a friend, Menn, with whom she discusses their philosophy surrounding the upcoming expedition to re-take wall Maria.
Jamie and Armin talk about Smajor, Lucille, and Armin's grandpa either complying with or dodging the draft. Armin's grandpa complies.

(*PS if you're using a screenreader, the link goes to my discord! I've been trying to figure out the html so the alternate text is included in the link, but it's been months and I haven't managed it yet, so I'm adding this author's note until I can actually get stuff sorted out*)

Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

> Eren and Jamie are concerned for very different reasons. Lucille realizes that there's a surprising amount of social awkwardness involved in military training.

Chapter Notes

> *Holy Mojang* it's been a while since I updated this fic. Last chapter was, what, a month ago? In that time, I have done the finals (4.0 gpa survives another quarter!), visited my extended family, and caught a cold.
>
> I've also poured an unreasonable amount of free time into playing MCC Island, but that's besides the point. Unless, of course, any of y'all also play and maybe want to do Battle Box together...?
> ...Ok someone please come help, I'm terrible at PvP and I have a coin quest that requires me to get six kills.
>
> *Anyway,* temporarily setting aside my video-game-related escapades, I hope you enjoy this installment of *Tilly!*

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Why’d you run off with that guy?”

Armin winces slightly at the hurt he hears in Eren’s voice. He hadn’t done anything wrong earlier, but he had left Eren out of the loop, which probably wasn’t very fun to deal with right after losing *his grandpa* their last responsible adult figure.

“...Sorry. I met him a bit ago and didn’t want to burn any bridges too early.”

Eren huffs.

“That doesn’t mean you should just roll over and go wherever he tells you without anyone to back you up.”

“If he was going to try anything, he would’ve done it the first time we met,” Armin reasons. “I was alone and nobody was around. He didn’t do anything, though. In fact, he gave me some food, which is a lot more than most people would do, so alienating him is the last thing I

want to do right now."

Eren's face scrunches up. Either he's angry, or he's trying to figure out what the word "alienating" means.

…It might be both, actually.

"Why is he even being that nice to you, anyway? How do you know he doesn't want something?"

Eren has a point. That said, Armin has already considered that point and discarded it.

"Eren, we're orphans without any kind of family, assets, or connections. If Jamie wanted to pull a con, he would've pulled it on someone he could actually gain something from."

Eren glares harder.

"I still don't think it's a good idea to run around with someone you barely know."

"Maybe it's a little reckless," Armin concedes, because *yeah*, he hasn't known Jamie long enough to gauge his character. "But it's got a high payoff," he continues, revealing the loaf of bread Mr. Smajor had given him at the end of their chat.

"I get that you're not the most comfortable with it. But really, we can't turn up food right now, *especially* if you want to survive long enough to join the Scouts."

Eren's eyes light up with a fire they only have when the Scouting Legion is mentioned. Armin has pushed the right buttons, he knows. Mikasa seems to realize this too, from the way she's looking at Eren, and she seems to agree with him, based on the slight nod in his direction.

Later, as Armin splits the bread amongst his friends, Eren starts another tirade about how vital it is that humanity goes to fight the titans.

Armin and Mikasa make eye contact. They both know that, for now, they need to focus on far more immediate needs than the titans or Eren's philosophy. Unfortunately for them, Eren seems to want to fight them every step of the way.

That's alright, though. They can deal with Eren. They can keep him alive for now. And later, when he enlists to join the Scouts, they'll be there to keep him alive too.

They just have to take things one day at a time.

Jamie is a little nervous.

There's nothing wrong, per se. At least, there's nothing wrong that he didn't know was going to go wrong before it happened, in the case of Miss Lucille getting drafted.

That said, Jamie is a bit nervous.

It's Smajor that's the problem. Smajor hasn't done something to him or anything — Jamie knows he wouldn't. But his general attitude has been a bit… erratic, ever since Lucille left.

It started with the bakery. Sure, Smajor is apparently really good at the whole baking thing, but starting a business on a whim? And because of a comment from a random kid, at that?

It's a little worrying.

If that was all, maybe Jamie would dismiss the whole thing, but it's not. On top of that, there's the disappearances. Sure, Smajor has always been hard to pin down, but vanishing for entire days only to show up with some food and deflect every question they ask him? It's strange.

It's a little worrying.

Maybe Jamie is just noticing Smajor's excursions more now that Miss Lucille is gone. Maybe he underestimated how invested Smajor is in baking. But he can't shake the feeling that there's something that he's missing. Something that's going on with Smajor.

Jamie knows that after Wall Maria fell, some adults got weird in the head with the stress of it all. Jamie knows that Smajor hit his head, which probably jumbled some stuff up in there on top of making him forget how to talk.

Jamie also knows that Smajor is really nice.

…He hopes he'll be okay.

Clang!

The poor unfortunate soul who Officer Fay called up to act as an example seems to be shuddering like a leaf as he holds his sword in a shaky block.

Lucille stands awkwardly. She's next to Menn, watching as their shiny-new commanding officer demonstrates different strikes on a man named Todd who Lucille has never met before, but still pities.

Every once in a while, someone glances over at Lucille — or, more specifically, at the sword whose tip is resting in the dust of the training ground.

Lucille keeps her back straight and her eyes forward. With any luck, they'll lose interest eventually. Besides, she can't let Todd's sacrifice go to waste, especially with the reclamation mission on the horizon: She needs to learn these strikes.

Several minutes of instruction/Todd-torture later, Officer Fay has them break up into pairs for practice. Lucille makes a valiant attempt to get paired with Menn. Her efforts are in vain, however, so she gets paired with Todd.

Todd's knees are shaking. He's probably still traumatized from having to block Officer Fay's "demonstration" strikes.

…Is it bad that Lucille feels sorry for him? She should really be focusing on learning the strikes herself, but…

"How about I'll guard and you try a few strikes, then we switch off?" she offers.

The sheer relief in Todd's eyes is palpable.

Lucille hefts Smajor's sword into a sturdy block, to match the heavy, arcing swings that Officer Fay said would be necessary for killing titans (*and wasn't that eerily similar to the overhead strikes Smajor had insisted on?*).

Across from Lucille, Todd gets his sword ready. It's shaking. A lot.

Lucille remembers Smajor constantly telling her to keep her blade steady during their nighttime training sessions.

…This guy is going to get eaten, isn't he?

At long last, Todd manages to swing his sword at Lucille. Lucille adjusts a little to block it more directly, but otherwise holds steady, far too used to having blades swung at her.

Todd's blade closes in, millimeters away from striking Lucille's.

Shing.

Todd's blade slams into Smajor's sword. Todd's blade also shatters into pieces.

…The two phenomena may be related.

Iron shrapnel skitter across the ground. Around them, trainees turn to look at them, visibly confused. Officer Fay turns to look too.

For half a second, Lucille considers hiding Smajor's sword behind her back. Unfortunately, having seen that strategy far too many times from the kids back at camp, she knows it's ineffective.

Lucille doesn't know how else to react, though. Does she apologize? Offer to help clean up the shrapnel? Ask Officer Fay to let Todd out of the draft because the man has obviously gone through enough today?

Before Lucille can come to a conclusion, Todd speaks up.

"Uh… should I go get a new sword?"

All eyes are now on Todd. Todd does not look happy about this. If anything, he looks extremely nervous.

Lucille *definitely* feels bad for him now.

"You do that," Officer Fay eventually says.

Todd scurries off to get a new sword. Lucille can still feel eyes on her.

…Just what kind of sword had Smajor given her?

Chapter End Notes

> That moment when someone decides to test whether iron or netherite swords are better... Honestly, poor Todd never stood a chance.
> Also, why do I keep giving names to characters that aren't meant to be important??? I only need them for like, one scene, and that scene is just to establish something completely unrelated to any of

the characters, but then all of the sudden they have names and personalities and then they're a main character that everyone loves more than the actual main characters.
(This is how Lucille happened, in case you were wondering)
Anyway... If anyone wants to chat about how insanely sus it is that Lucille strolls up to her military draft with an unbreakable hell-sword, feel free to join my Discord!
[Link Description: text reading "my Discord!" that links to the fic author's Discord server]

B A K E R Y C H A P T E R (Bakery Chapter)

Chapter Summary

Let's get this bread

Chapter Notes

Ao3 is back up, my beloved!
To celebrate, have a little fluffy chapter before we get to the Maria Reclamation Mission ^v^

(Also, yes, the meme was necessary)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[image]

Image provided by pom! via my discord

Scott glances critically at the array of blocks in front of him.

The block palette he's set up is gorgeous. He's gone wood-heavy, using birch, spruce, and warped woods. But there's a problem with that: the warped wood. Warped wood is Nether wood, which is amazing, since it doesn't burn, but is also a bit risky, since the players here don't know about the Nether and Scott doesn't think he's supposed to tell them.

To be fair, he's already given Nether materials to Lucille. That sword was unmistakably netherite. But this server is definitely some kind of modded, so a weird metal is easy to excuse. The question is whether blue wood can be written off as easily.

…It's just looks so cute. Surely, if someone presses for answers, he can think of some kind of excuse?

"Jamie?"

Jamie looks away from the game he and his friends were playing - pick-up sticks, if you were wondering - to see Smajor standing in front of him.

"Yeah?"

“Where is it okay to build?”

Jamie blinks. Has Smajor gotten his words mixed up again?

“Uhh… what do you want to build?” he checks, just in case.

“Bakery.”

Jamie blinks again. When Armin had brought it up, he’d laughed a little at the assumption. When Smajor had gone along with it, he’d hoped the man was joking, rather than making a big decision on a whim.

(*Smajor really doesn’t have any impulse control, does he?*)

Apparently Jamie shouldn’t have assumed.

“Uhh…” he stumbles, trying to think. “You have to get some kinda license, right?”

“License?”

“A piece of paper that gives you permission to do things,” Jamie explains on autopilot. “You need it to build things.”

Smajor nods.

“Where do I go to get a license?”

Jamie wracks his brain.

“Town hall, right?” Leo pipes up, and Jamie thanks the Walls that he did.

“That’s the big long building on the northwest side of town,” Jamie adds, just to make sure Smajor knows what they’re talking about.

Smajor nods and immediately sets off. He heads northwest — next time Jamie sees him, he might have a building license.

“You know,” Leo starts, “with how good Smajor’s bread is, he’ll probably be rich enough to buy one of those fancy mansions the nobles have if he manages to get that bakery open.”

Jamie hums.

“You think he’d let us hang around his fancy house?”

“Probably. I bet he’d sneak around the hallways a lot, though, like some kinda witch or something.”

Jamie considers for a moment.

“…A good witch though.”

“Yeah. A good witch.”

There’s a chorus of agreement from the rest of Jamie’s friends. Then, they go back to pick-up sticks.

Getting permission to build is surprisingly difficult.

Scott had gone to the town hall as instructed, but the player there had told him that he’d needed to buy land first. He couldn’t buy land at the town hall, though. He had to go find a player willing to sell and buy it directly.

Scott had, of course, immediately gone in search of such a player. He even managed to find one before too long! Unfortunately for him, the player wouldn’t take resources in exchange for the land. Instead, they’d demanded the currency used on this server — a coin of some sort, apparently. They’d wanted a lot of them, too.

That brings him to now. He’s wandering around the market, trying to find stalls he can sell resources to in exchange for enough coins to start a bakery. Scott has all his best stuff with him: tools, food, wood… he’s even got a couple of diamonds left over from his last mining session!

He hasn’t had any takers yet, though.

Out of the corner of his eye, Scott spots another shop. It seems to be selling accessories of some kind. Maybe the shopkeeper will be interested in some kind of gemstone or ore that Scott has…?

Pulling his diamonds out of his inventory, Scott strolls into shop.

A lot of diamond-examination, several pointed questions about whether he’s a thief, and a good deal of haggling later, Scott walks out of the shop with a pouch of coins.

Bakery, here he comes.

Chapter End Notes

Scott: Ooh, this is a fun little storyline! Love the quest sequence for the bakery <3
Everyone in the AoT-verse: What the f-
~
PS join my discord
[Link description: text reading "my discord" that links to the author's discord server]

The Maria Reclamation Mission: Part One

Chapter Summary

> It's really all in the title: the Maria Reclamation Mission officially starts.

Chapter Notes

> Okay this chapter is getting way too long so I decided to split it into parts... Sorry in advance for the cliffhanger.
>
> **Trigger Warning Info!**
> - Reference to population control via bloodthirsty titan
> - Thoughts of death
> - Named character death
> - Gore (like, significant gore)
> - Reference to suicide missions
>
> **If any of those things are potential triggers for you, skip to end notes & I will have a summary for you. If you don't I will be sad and also teleport to your house to whack you with a self-care book, and then you'll have to explain to everyone you know that you got whacked by a scrawny little 5'4" fanfic author with a flippin' self-help book. Idk about you but if that happened to me I would hide away in shame for the rest of my life**
> (*Seriously please take care of yourselves*)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Katherine Fay does not get paid enough for this mess.

Going out to fight man-eating giants is bad enough. Between the trauma and the actual life-threatening danger, no amount of compensation will ever be enough.

Adding in this reclamation mission, though? With people who interrupt, fumble around with weapons, and, in the very strange case of one Lucille Salus, bring their own ‘family heirloom’ instead of using the gear that is *literally mass-produced for titan annihilation?*

Sweet Sina, Kat is already tired.

She can’t even be glad that the thing will be over soon, because ‘over’

means ‘most of the Maria survivors die.’

…Walls, she feels bad now.

It’s not even that she’s not doing her best to train them — she’s dedicated her heart to this assignment, just like she has every other. But at the end of the day? Command won’t be satisfied until they’ve either retaken Maria, which isn’t happening, or shaved off enough refugees to make the famine less severe.

Kat sighs.

When did everything go wrong?

Lucille’s hands are shaking.

She’s made it through training. What little there was of it, anyway. She’d even managed to do it without anyone asking too many questions about Smajor’s sword, *plus,* she’d made a friend while doing it!

(She also met Todd)

Lucille wishes she could look back and say the hard part is over. She’d be lying, though. Smuggling in a sketchy sword has *nothing* on what she’s about to face. On the *things* waiting just outside the gate she’s been staring at for the past ten minutes while Garrison troops blast a path for her and her fellow refugees to exit.

Walls, is this going to be her last time inside Wall Rose? Has her last breakfast already passed her by? Will she ever get the chance to shake answers out of Smajor about his wacky habits and his stupid, more-trouble-than-it's-worth sword?

Lucille blinks as Menn elbows her.

“Hey. You good?”

Lucille huffs in a way that’s almost a laugh, but isn’t.

“As good as I’m gonna get.”

“Good enough for me.”

Lucille nods.

"...Hey, you think we'll actually manage to kill one?"

Lucille hums as she considers. Setting aside all matters of survival, *can* the refugees kill a titan? Will Lucille and Menn, specifically, manage it?

"One of them, sure. The problem's when there's a lot of them, right?"

Menn chuckles.

"I guess so… Let's try and take one of 'em down with us, yeah?"

Lucille smiles. It is not a pretty smile, nor a happy one. The only thing behind it is determination and a morbid, terrified wish to go down in a blaze of glory.

"Let's do that."

"AT THE READY!" Officer Fay shouts from the front of their formation.

As if on cue, the gates begin creaking open. Everyone tenses around Lucille. She grips her sword a little tighter, like a steady grip is all it will take to survive what waits beyond the walls.

Sweet Sina, Lucille isn't ready to die.

"MOVE OUT!"

You'd think that the refugees would get swarmed by titans the minute they stepped out of the gates, but you'd be wrong. A hefty dose of canon fire from the Garrison had ensured some breathing room for the Maria survivors. After all, they couldn't risk a titan getting into the city when the gate opened — that would end in a massacre.

(Weren't they already planning a massacre?)

(*Why do the citizens of Wall Rose matter more than the Maria refugees?*)

(*Does the government really care more about the Wall Rose citizens, or is it just doing what it can get away with?*)

Lucille marches a little closer to Menn than is strictly necessary. If pressed, she will readily admit that she is *absolutely terrified*.

"MARCH FOR THE FOREST TO THE SOUTHEAST!" Officer Fay

shouts. “WE’LL USE THE COVER TO ADVANCE.”

Lucille follows dutifully with her fellow refugees. Unfortunately for all present, they don’t make it to the forest.

Lucille swears she feels her heart stutter when a handful of titans stagger out of the forest and start sprinting toward the refugees. Menn seems to be having similar difficulties, if their shaking hands are any indication.

Walls, Lucille wishes she was home. She wishes she was at her *actual* home, and that said home had never been overrun by titans in the first place, and that she could be confident that she’ll return somewhere safe after all this is over. …But that’s just wishful thinking. There will be no returning home, and there will be no safety.

“WEAPONS AT THE READY!”

The titans are on them all too quickly. Lucille raises her sword in front of her, mimicking what Smajor and Officer Fay drilled into her, but it feels pathetic in the face of the 9-meter-tall monster barrelling towards her.

Luckily — or perhaps unluckily — Lucille isn’t the first person the titans reach. That dubious honor goes to Todd.

To Todd’s credit, he does manage to get his sword up. Lucille can see the blade glinting and shaking from here. The sword isn’t enough, though. The titan grabs Todd without so much as noticing the blade.

Lucille isn’t really sure what she expected when she was told they’d be fighting man-eating monsters. It wasn’t this, though. It wasn’t seeing the titan crunch into Todd’s bones, splintering him in half but not outright killing him, leaving him to scream while he chokes on his own blood. It wasn’t not having time to process Todd’s death because more people are already falling to the titans.

Lucille’s blade is shaking like Todd’s was just a moment ago. Menn isn’t doing any better — Lucille can hear their panicked breathing from here.

Looking back on it, Lucille will realize that they probably would’ve just stood there without intervention. They would’ve stared in horror until the titans took them too.

It’s Officer Fay that saves them. She shouts something — Lucille

doesn't register the words — and it snaps them both out of their gore-induced trance.

Lucille adjusts her grip on her sword and plants her feet. The titan is coming at her far faster than she can run at it: all she needs to do is wait.

The titan is actually surprisingly fast. You'd expect something that big and bulky to lumber around like a drunk lumberjack, but no: the titan stomps toward Lucille, running far faster than it has any right to.

The titan reaches out to grab Lucille the minute it's close enough to do so. Lucille is ready for it, though: when it reaches for her, Lucille swings her sword at it, *hard*.

She severs the monster's whole hand off.

Huh. Officer Fay said that titan flesh is tough, and that it takes a lot of force to cut through, but it actually wasn't that bad. Lucille's sword cut right through it.

Maybe Officer Fay was just trying to make sure everyone took the fight seriously? Lucille doesn't see why she thought she needed to make something up for that, though. All she had to do was tell everyone that they'd die if they didn't listen and they'd put maximum effort (plus a little more) into doing what she said. She wouldn't even be lying, for Sina's sake!

...But Lucille supposes it's not not her decision to make.

"Lucille!" Menn shouts.

The titan is lunging down, ready to bite into Lucille's ribs. Sheer instinct has Lucille swinging her sword over her head. In a stroke of luck, Lucille manages to slice through the muscles of the titan's jaw, leaving her stuck in a titan's mouth, but not crunched into meaty bits.

Just as she thinks that, the titan's wounds start steaming and knitting themselves back together.

Right. Regeneration. The only way to kill these things is to hit them in the neck, right?

Lucille glances up towards the titan's esophagus. …It can't hurt to try, right?

Lucille starts clambering towards the back of the titan's mouth, conveniently helped by the titan's tongue working to push her down its throat. Lucille doesn't go down the throat, though: Instead, when she gets to the back of the mouth, she takes her sword and stabs towards where she thinks the nape of the neck might be. Then she stabs again. Then she does some slashing and hacking, just for variety.

Lucille keeps going until she sees light through the many, many punctures in the titan's throat. Then she makes one last swipe for luck and starts climbing out of the titan, sword clutched in her armpit so she can climb better.

Somehow, Lucille manages to crawl her way through the burning-hot titan's flesh to freedom. She gets out and clambers onto the surface of the titan's neck.

She's a little above the nape. Apparently she misjudged where she ought to be aiming. That's fine, though: she has a clear shot now.

Pulling her sword back into her hand (it's covered in titan blood, *gross*), Lucille leans down and starts attacking the titan's nape properly. It takes a bit, and Lucille feels like she ought to be going quicker, but eventually the titan falls and starts steaming and disintegrating beneath her feet.

Lucille huffs. She didn't realize it before, but she's panting, and her heart is jackrabbiting with the adrenaline pumping through her veins.

She takes another breath, letting herself calm down a bit.

She did it. She killed a titan. She didn't even need help!

"Menn! Did you see that!"

Lucille looks toward where she last saw her friend. Said friend looks excited, but they're also stuck in the dissolving grip of the titan Lucille just killed. They're holding themself strangely too, like they've been hurt.

…Sweet Sina, Menn's been hurt, haven't they?

Lucille clambers over the steaming corpse of the titan and books it over to Menn.

"Are you okay!?"

“That was insane!” Mean shouts just as Lucille reaches them.

“Thanks, but are you injured?”

Menn winces a bit.

“Yeah. The titan grabbed me around the torso — I think I heard something crack.”

Lucille winces. A broken bone is suboptimal, to say the least.

“Alright. Can you walk?”

“I’m gonna have to, aren’t I?”

“Ok. Stay near me — if a titan gets too close I’ll try and deal with it, but you should be ready to run.”

Menn nods.

Lucille takes their hand and starts retreating. Surely, she can run now that she’s killed a titan, right? That seems reasonable.

(*This mission wasn’t meant to succeed, it was meant as population control-*)

“Thanks, by the way,” Menn says between gasps of pain.

“Huh?”

“For helping me out. You’re a way slower target, now.”

Lucille huffs a short laugh.

“Not like it makes a difference. These fuckers are *fast*.”

“You’re telling me!”

Lucille looks out over the field and catches sight of Officer Fay. She pauses for a moment — is talking to her the right option? Or will she just get told off for abandoning the fight?

Lucille glances away from Officer Fay. There’s visibly less people than they set out that morning. The grass beneath her feet is covered with blood, so much so that it feels slick and slippery and absolutely horrible to walk on.

(*Titan blood dissolves, so everything beneath her feet is-*)

Surely, after this many losses, Officer Fay will call a retreat? They have to have lost enough by now…

Officer Fay is easy to keep track of: She's zipping around on that grappling gear that all the soldiers use, making her stand out against the grounded refugee troops. She's killing a titan right now, but she'll have to swing down in a minute.

Lucille drags Menn to where she thinks Officer Fay will be landing.

She's lucky: Officer Fay lands only a few meters in front of them.

"Officer Fay!"

"What!" the woman snaps, switching her blades out even as she speaks.

"You've got to call a retreat!"

Officer Fay snorts. Lucille has just enough time to feel rage start pooling in her chest before Officer Fay opens her mouth to speak again.

"Go ahead, try to run. See how far you get before one of these fuckers hunts you down." She briefly glances over to Menn and Lucille. "It'll be even worse if you're planning on dragging that one along — unless you were planning to use them as a distraction as soon as a titan gets too close?"

Lucille's temper flares.

"You *fucking bitch*," she hisses. "You could at least pretend to care!"

Officer Fay's expression drops to something flat and distinctly unimpressed.

"You think I *like* watching all you idiots die? Think a-*fucking*-gain. Unfortunately for all of us, orders are orders, and we're in far too deep to turn back now, so if you want to make something of your pathetic little lives, get your swords out and try to take one of these monsters down with you."

Lucille purses her lips. Officer Fay isn't wrong — the titans will start gobbling them up wholesale if they make a run for it. But the same thing happens if they stay, so they have to at least *try*.

“What if we do a rearguard sort of thing? That way at least a few people can make it.”

“And who would stay behind?” Officer Fay challenges.

…Who *would* stay behind? Should it be the slow and injured, who probably can’t make it back anyway? Or the ones who did best in training, who have the best shot at taking down a few titans before kicking the bucket? Can Lucille even make that decision?

Can Lucille even…

“Me,” she says.

Officer Fay blinks.

“Sorry?”

“Me,” Lucille repeats. “I’ll stay behind.”

Menn is looking at her like she’s crazy. …Honestly, Lucille feels a little crazy after saying that. Officer Fay seems to have been taken a bit off-guard, but she also seems to be looking at Lucille with something new — maybe respect? Or maybe just a reevaluation of Lucille’s sense of self-preservation...

“I’m sure a few other volunteers would be willing to help out too,” Lucille adds, a weird tinge of desperation on her voice that she can’t place the cause of.

“...If the group splits, the runners and the rearguard will just get swarmed individually and die twice as fast.”

“Then the rearguard can retreat too — we’ll just go slower so the titans come for us first.”

Officer Fay looks Lucille dead in the eyes. Lucille swallows nervously — will they be allowed to retreat? Or is she committing treason with Menn today?

“Alright.”

Lucille deflates a little bit in relief. Then she remembers that she just signed on for the most suicidal part of the suicide mission and tenses right back up.

Officer Fay is shouting a few more people over. Presumably, she’s

gathering up the rearguard. While she's doing that, Menn leans closer in to Lucille, so their face is right by Lucille's ear.

"What are you thinking!?" Menn whisper-hisses. *"You can't just throw your life away!"*

Menn says that, and the weight of what Lucille just agreed to just hits her.

…She's less scared than she thinks she ought to be. The kids have Smajor (and vice versa), so that's taken care of. With any luck, Lucille's sacrifice will give Menn the chance to get back to their kids, so that's good.

Lucille takes a deep breath.

"Take good care of your kids, yeah?"

"What!? Lucille, you can't-"

"GET OVER HERE, SALUS!"

Lucille marches over to Officer Fay. Menn might be calling after her, or they might not — Lucille's ears are ringing too much to make anything out.

…She's not quite sure what she's supposed to be thinking right now. Is she supposed to be hoping for a glorious death? Asking the goddesses to let her sacrifice save the lives of others? Or is she supposed to be terrified? Should she be asking whether she can run and hide and save herself and leave all the others to rot? Is she just supposed to accept her fate and her duty quietly?

Lucille grits her teeth. She's not sure how she's supposed to go about this, but she's made a commitment, and she *will* see it through.

Even if it's the last thing she does.

Chapter End Notes

Summary for those that skipped:
Officer Fay thinks about the Maria Reclamation Mission. Lucille and Menn chat about it & discuss whether they can kill a titan. Mission starts. Todd dies. Menn gets injured. Lucille ends up in a titan's mouth but badasses her way out with the power of her OP titan-wrecking netherite sword. She then tries to help Menn and

ends up in a shouting match with Officer Fay about whether or not to retreat. Lucille manages to get Officer Fay to agree to the retreat by offering to stay back as part of a rearguard. Chapter ends on a fun and sexy cliffhanger where Lucille resolves to give her all as part of the rearguard.

Okay now we do actual notes:
Sorry again for the cliffhanger, but this is 6 pages in Google Docs, so... chapter split. I'll try to get the next chapter out before August 20. Why August 20? Because that will mark the one-year anniversary of me deciding to post this glorious mess.
Speaking of August 20, I'm thinking of doing a bit of a celebratory Q-n-A stream thing where I read the whole fic thus far and answer questions. I haven't figured out details yet, but I'll probably put more info in the end notes of the next chapter, and if you want to stay up-to-date on where I'm going with that, you can always join my Discord

Maria Reclamation Mission: Part II

Chapter Summary

The end of the Maria Reclamation Mission

Chapter Notes

Hello all! I'm Menial, State's brother/sibling depending on the day. I'm uploading this chapter because State is currently in surgery but refused to miss an update. Make sure to read the trigger warnings and if it ever feels like it's too much take a break and come back to it later. Stay hydrated and all that jazz and without further ado here is the latest and greatest chapter of Tilly!

Trigger Warnings:
- Violence
- Gore
- More Gore
- Description of the corpse of a named character
You have been warned

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kat doesn't have much time to reorganize her troops. Expeditions in titan territory are like that: everything moves about five times as fast as you can handle, and you're forced to run on sheer instinct just to scrape together half a chance at making it back.

Luckily for Kat, she's been in the Scouts long enough to know how to roll with the punches.

"YOU! OVER THERE. EVERYONE I JUST CALLED OUT IS NOW THE REARGUARD. I'LL BE LEADING YOU. IF I DIDN'T CALL YOU OUT, IT'S TIME TO RETREAT!"

The word "retreat" is barely out of her mouth before people start sprinting back toward the walls. A few of her rearguard start running too — useless idiots.

Salus, at least, is holding her promise to stay back. Kat still has no idea what the woman was smoking when she decided to bring a "family heirloom" on a suicide mission, but she respects the balls on the other woman, especially now that they're in titan territory.

Just as she thinks that, a titan reaches out to grab Salus. The woman doesn't move a muscle.

Well. There goes her only somewhat-reliable soldier. Kat would say she'll remember her, but really, she's probably going to drink this entire experience out of her brain the minute she gets home.

(*...If she gets home*)

Kat gets her grapples ready. There's a titan coming in from the southwest that might split the rearguard from the retreating group if they're not careful, and the force *cannot* afford to split right now.

Out of the corner of her eye, she notices Salus moving. Well, she's not actually moving, just swinging her sword around. Kat would applaud the action if it wasn't so utterly useless. It takes at least two good hits to break a titan's bone, and there's too many muscles involved in gripping something for Salus to sever them all in one go.

Salus brings her "family heirloom" down on the titan's wrist.

Somehow, against all known logic and several combat drills, Salus manages to cut the thing's hand off.

What the hell?

Of course, cutting off a hand doesn't stop the titan from lunging to chomp down on where Salus is standing.

(*Weird or not, Salus doesn't deserve to-*)

…At least it's busy for a minute. That should give Kat time to deal with the western titan and loop back around to help the rearguard.

Kat fires her grapples into the titan as soon as it's close enough to get a good shot. She doesn't try to go up to its neck — the titan will just grab her before she ever reaches the nape. Instead, she swings around and cuts into the tendons on the back of the monster's legs.

The titan trips and falls immediately. Kat rockets forward with her grapples as fast as she can, making use of the brief opening to cut into the titan's nape. The titan begins dissolving beneath her.

Good. She's killed it.

Kat turns to look toward the rearguard. The titan that ate Salus is still prone, it seems, and-

Its neck is bleeding?

As Kat watches, something — or, more accurately, *someone* — hacks and slashes its way out of the titan's neck. It's a bloody process: steam and blood sizzle and fly every which way as some kind of blade periodically pokes out of the titan's skin and retracts. This goes on for a while until, eventually, a human figure clambers out of the titan's flesh.

Salus stands atop the titan's neck, absolutely covered in the dissolving blood of the creature. From where Kat is standing, she can see Salus glancing down, presumably to check whether she's adequately mangled the thing's nape.

She has.

What the fuck? Kat thinks, completely unsure how Salus managed that.

Actually, no. It doesn't matter. If it works, it works, and Kat can wonder what devil Salus sold her soul to for that kind of luck when she's safe behind the walls.

Kat spins on her heel and starts sprinting toward the rearguard. The whole group is doing its job, holding the titans' attention and backing up slowly — did Salus tell them to do that? Or is it just their fear driving them to huddle with their retreating fellows?

Well, what fellows remain, that is. How many had Kat come out here with? 50,000? More? And that's not even everyone — Kat knows there are other units being deployed from the eastern and western gates of Wall Rose, meant to split the titan hordes and keep them from concentrating in a specific area.

Kat glances around. There can't be more than 3,000 left, and there's less every second.

She doesn't have time to think about that, though. There's a titan sprinting at the rearguard, and if they split apart, they'll be in an even worse position than they already are — if that's even possible.

As soon as she's close enough, Kat repeats the same tactic she used on the other titan: grapple, cut tendon, grapple, sever nape. Out of the corner of her eye, she sees what she's 80% sure is Salus purposefully catching a titan's attention and cutting off its wrist, which *she is not thinking about because if it works it works.*

Kat manages to kill three titans in the time it takes for Salus to finish up with that one. Honestly, she's impressed — Salus is slow as hell, but that level of consistency in murdering titans is admirable, even if she ends up covered in blood and titan slobber every time.

The rest of the rearguard isn't faring so well, unfortunately. It's quickly dwindling to only a small handfull of people.

"EVERYONE PULL BACK!" Kat shouts. "WE CAN'T GET TOO FAR FROM THE MAIN GROUP!"

Everyone who isn't in a titan's mouth starts backing up. Kat supposes that's the upside to so many people dying — everyone who was too scared to be useful is already gone.

(*Sina, what is she even thinking…*)

Kat makes eye contact with Salus. She gives the other woman a brief nod — she doesn't have time for anything more, but she does appreciate Salus' contributions.

Salus nods back. Then, she looks past Kat, and her face drops.

"MENN!" she shrieks, taking off running for the retreating group.

Welp. There goes Kat's only reliable soldier.

Kat glances back. It looks like a titan made it to the retreating group — that's not good. That's probably what Salus was screaming about, come to think of it…

"YOU HEARD HER, MEN! DEFEND THE RETREATING GROUP!"

Out of the corner of her eye, Kat sees Salus frozen next to a limb(?). There's a titan going for her, but Kat doesn't have time to help. She needs to keep an eye on the rest of the group.

Kat might just be signing Salus' death warrant, but she grapples away, already locked on to the next titan standing in her way.

Lucille wants to throw up.

Menn is lying on the ground in front of her. At least, half of them is.

(*Why is there so much blood-*)

Lucille can see the snapped ends of multiple ribs. Blood is slowly dribbling out onto the ground and drying, making every step far more sticky than Lucille has the mental capacity to process. Menn's face is-

Well. Lucille isn't sure she has the words to describe Menn's face right now.

Before Lucille actually manages to lose her breakfast, a shadow covers Menn's corpse. A new, twisted kind of muscle memory has Lucille spinning on the blood-slick ground to face the titan now looming over her.

Walls, can't this be over? Does Lucille really have to keep suffering here?

Lucille manages to time her swipe correctly to sever the titan's hand. From there, she spends another few minutes crawling in titan slobber (*yuck*) to stab her way out through the creature's nape.

Sweet Sina, Lucille doesn't want to do this anymore…

The rest of the mission passes in a haze of running around and crawling around in the mouths of various titans. Lucille isn't sure how they manage it, but she and a small handful of others manage to get back home.

She looks around.

When she'd set out this morning, she couldn't even see to the end of the crowd. Now, she could probably fit the survivors into a single room, and not one of those massive fancy ones nobles are supposed to have.

(*When she'd set out this morning, Menn had been-*)

Lucille glances over to Officer Fay. The soldier seems to be trying to find someone, perhaps to give her report or something similar.

Officer Fay doesn't seem to be having much luck. She's turning, looking around… She's headed in Lucille's direction, now, maybe going to look somewhere else.

She's passing by, now…

"Hey," Lucille calls.

Officer Fay turns to Lucille and raises an eyebrow, not seeming too enthusiastic about being interrupted. She does come to see what's going on, though. That's what counts.

Lucille swallows as Officer Fay comes to face her. Her mouth feels dry all of the sudden, though whether it's from not having any water during the mission or from what she's about to ask, she has no idea.

Why did she call Officer Fay over, again?

Menn stands up and faces Lucille head-on.

"Some people have to die," they repeat, "and I'd rather it be me than my kids. And I'd rather my kids remember me as brave than as terrified, and I'd rather spend my last moments living as I am than in fear."

"How do I join the Scouts?"

Chapter End Notes

> So... wasn't that chapter a ton of fun? All jokes aside though if you did enjoy the chapter then maybe consider joining State's discord. You'll always know when a chapter comes out and even get access to sneak peaks of new chapters.
>
> The link to the discord: https://discord.gg/QCagYvrS
>
> And if you though the chapter notes were cool come follow me at twitch.tv/menialace because I'm going to stream after I finish posting this chapter!

Walls

Chapter Summary

> In which the author offscreens Smajor and the kids reacting to Lucille becoming a Scout, Pearl gets a pet, and Smajor continues using his block game logic to break AoT.

Chapter Notes

> Ya gal is back in action! It's been one crazy quarter -- work and school and college applications, oh my! -- but I'm ecstatic to get back to this fic.
>
> Also, I want to say thank you to everyone who commented on the last chapter. Going from surgery to one of the hardest quarters of my academic career was a lot, and reading/rereading y'all's comments made a lot of long, stressful days a lot happier. So, thanks for reading, and kudo-ing, and commenting, and being your lovely selves, because you've brought a lot of light and joy into my life.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lucille takes a deep breath.

The wagon to her new station — the Scouting Legion headquarters — trundles along in a fashion bumpy enough to prevent any hope of catching a nap along the way. Then again, Lucille probably wouldn't be able to sleep anyway. Smajor had taken her decision to officially join the Scouts well enough, but the kids had been understandably distraught.

Lucille stands by her decision. The titans are a problem that won't just go away if left alone, and she has no intention to foist responsibility for dealing with it onto Smajor or the kids. But, at the same time, she doesn't want to see those heartbroken looks on the kids' faces ever again.

…They'll be alright, though. Smajor will keep them fed, and before long, they'll have Lucille's military paycheck to support them. All Lucille needs to do is focus on surviving.

Lucille glances to the sword Smajor gave her. The one that got her through the reclamation mission. The one she plans to keep close, just

in case another wall falls.

Survival. Lucille can do that.

Pearl is ready to go.

She's been checking her inventory for the past however-long-it's-been, making sure that she has everything she could possibly need for any eventuality. Not-zombies? Yeah, she's got splash poison all ready to go. Hostile players? She already has her axe in her hotbar. Dog? She has a whole stack of bones to give it.

That last one is *very* necessary.

Pearl checks over her inventory one last time. She's a little nervous, just because she doesn't know what's waiting for her above ground, but she won't let that stop her: She needs to find a way home, and sitting here won't get her there any faster.

A chirping sound cuts through Pearl's thoughts.

Pearl spins toward the noise and pulls her axe out, ready to strike the-

-axolotl?

The mob in question turns to look at Pearl inquisitively. Somewhat embarrassed, Pearl puts her axe back into her inventory.

"Hey there little buddy," she says, crouching. "Sorry, I've been a little jumpy lately. You really scared me there!"

The axolotl doesn't respond, but it does do a little spin. It's actually pretty adorable.

It's also blue, Pearl realizes. That's pretty rare, right? Or was the gold axolotl the rarest? Regardless of rarity, the little lizard-fish thing is adorable. Pearl doesn't waste any time grabbing her water bucket.

"Alright little guy, you wanna be friends with me?"

Without waiting for a response, Pearl scoops the axolotl into her water bucket.

"I shall call you Bubbles," she declares, "and you shall keep me sane."

So saying, Pearl proceeds to her anvil to name Bubbles.

…Wait. Bubbles is going to take up an inventory slot. That means Pearl needs to eject something from the inventory she just spent the last however-long-it's-been organizing.

Ugh. Can't she catch a break?

Pearl carefully flips open the trapdoor that leads above ground.

Bubbles is sitting in the top corner of her inventory. The little amphibian serves as a nice morale boost each time Pearl opens her inventory. Honestly, it was worth getting rid of her "In Case of Dog" bones to be able to take Bubbles along.

The groans that Pearl has come to associate with the gigantic not-zombies start to echo overhead. Pearl resists the urge to roll her eyes. For a mob that apparently ceases to function after one measly poison pot, it's awfully cocky.

Still, Pearl drinks the first of her three invisibility potions. This way she doesn't have to waste her poison too early. Besides, it lasts for a full eight minutes — that's far more time than she'd get from disabling a few of the mobs.

Pearl climbs up onto the surface and picks a direction at random. If she bothered to check F3, she'd realize she's headed south, but she doesn't. She doesn't need to. She's not looking for anything specific, except maybe some sugarcane, so there's no point worrying about which direction she goes. It would just waste time.

Luckily for Pearl, she manages to find some sugarcane fairly quickly. It's in a strange, lifeless, too-thin structure, filled to the brim with weird, rounded barrels and lacking the mobs she associates with generated structures. The whole place creeps her out, but it has what she wants, so Pearl grabs her sugarcane and screenshots the coordinates for later reference.

Pearl continues south. She finds more and more lifeless structures with too-thin walls, but none of them are as large as the building with the barrels, and they certainly don't have anything valuable in them.

Then, she finds *it*. A thick, massive wall, maybe 60 blocks high and made of some kind of light stone, with sections that jut out for decoration. Its surface is perfectly smooth, with the exception of the gatehouses. The gatehouses seem to have been destroyed somehow — TNT, maybe? Or a Wither? Pearl doesn't know what else could have

caused the massive hole she sees in the gates.

Lady have mercy, this is madness. For a wall of this size, stretching as far as she can see in both directions, this server must have an economy to rival Hermitcraft's. For the massive holes in the gates, someone must have been invading with an army big enough to need an entrance that wide. And if this world is truly hardcore? None of them cared about permanently banning another player.

…Or would it be a permakill?

Lady Moon told Pearl this world was dangerous. Pearl knows it's hardcore, and with the recent evidence, she knows the players here wage war on a massive scale. But would they really permakill each other?

…Pearl doesn't know.

She needs full netherite. Ender pearls. Dogs. Enchants. She doesn't know whether these people would permakill, or if she still has the admin tether from Double Life to protect her, but by the Lady above, *she isn't taking the chance.*

Scott needs to build stuff. He also needs to not get seen building stuff, because from what he's seen, the people here don't know how to place blocks.

(Scott shoves down the bubbling sense of incredulity at the idea of players not knowing how to place blocks, of all things)

There's a solution here. Scott knows there's a solution here, and it's the same one he's been using the whole time he's been stuck on this server: Do important/illegal stuff at night, when everyone is asleep. The thing is, this time he'll be doing said important/illegal stuff above ground, where a poorly-timed midnight stroll could lead to some very awkward encounters. It'll also take forever because he won't be able to work during the day.

Unless… What if he built a little wall around the area? That way people can't see him, even if he works during the day.

Yeah, that'll work.

(Somewhere in the back of his mind, Scott has a creeping sense that he's getting far too comfortable bending the rules)

Chapter End Notes

You know, I'm 99% sure the idea for Bubbles came from someone in my Discord, but I can't remember who. I want to say it was AmythestMoon? But I really don't remember. It was, like, 8 months ago.

Anyway, see y'all in the next update!

EDIT (Dec. 16, 2023): It was not, in fact, AmethystMoon who suggested Bubbles to me. It was Commander Cote. Sorry for the mix-up Cote — you can have your well-deserved recognition now

Everyone, say thank you to Cote for coming up with Bubbles

The Right Time

Chapter Summary

> *Scott bites his lip. It's a gesture he picked up from Lucille, and he's not quite sure what it's supposed to mean, but he's taken to doing it when he's nervous. It ought to help him blend in, at any rate.*
>
> *But blending in won't help him navigate this conversation. He needs to focus on getting his point across. So how does he explain to Jamie that, right now, fighting is not a good thing?*
>
> *"There's times to fight—" Scott starts, not quite sure where he's going, "—and there's times to set things aside. This is not a time to fight, Jamie."*

Chapter Notes

> Another surgery down and ya gal is back in action! This chapter is gonna set up some stuff for later, so everyone get excited!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Scott is pretty proud of how his bakery is coming along.

There were stumbling blocks, at first. For example, this world apparently has smithing templates for bread that put patterns on it, and if you don't have a signature pattern, people get upset at you. It was an easy enough fix, of course — all his bread has cute flower designs on it now! — but it was rather harrowing in the moment. After all, Scott isn't very used to being accused of "bread fraud."

He hadn't even known you could commit fraud with bread! And all that wasn't even touching on the looks he'd gotten after he built his bakery…

Regardless, the power of friendship (and a few well-placed bribes to those soldiers with the unicorn emblems on their backs) won out in the end, and now Scott's operation is perfectly legal, entirely inconspicuous, and running smoothly.

The rush has completely wound down for the day. Scott's behind-the-counter stock is nearly out, so he'll have to spend tonight farming and crafting new bread for tomorrow. He's been thinking of expanding to cakes, too, but he's not quite sure where to acquire a cow and sugarcane for the milk and sugar, respectively.

"Oi, what do you think you're doing!?"

Scott tabs out of the window where he was double-checking his inventory for more wheat or bread to see Jamie grabbing the wrist of an unknown half-tall player (a child, Scott thinks they're called), the half-tall player's hand clenched around a loaf of bread Smajor hadn't sold them.

"You think you can just take whatever you like!?" Jamie spits.

Ah. Violence. And on Scott's behalf! It's sweet of Jamie to try and help out, but maybe not the best thing when Scott has just been forced to 'make really good friends with' (read: bribe) the unicorn soldiers.

The Military Police. Whatever. Same thing.

"Hey now," Scott interjects, stepping out from behind the counter. "No need to get violent. What's going on here?"

The half-tall- *The child,* Scott reminds himself, makes a face that Scott has come to associate with a child getting caught doing something they aren't supposed to be doing. Jamie, on the other hand, shifts his expression to something indignant.

"I caught this one—" Jamie begins, jostling the other child "—nicking a loaf."

Jamie looks up at Scott expectantly. Scott waits for a moment, then remembers that players here make facial expressions to show their reactions to things they're hearing, and Scott has made no such expressions yet.

He thinks for a moment, then raises his eyebrows, which he's pretty sure is some kind of request for more information. It must not be, though, because Jamie doesn't say anything else.

"...And?" Scott finally asks.

Jamie does the eyebrow thing that Scott just did. …Scott is starting to think it might not just be a way to ask for more information.

“And she’s stealing from you?”

Jamie sounds mildly incredulous. Scott takes a moment to thank Mojang that tonal cues are the same on this wacky server, then considers his response for a moment.

On one hand, Scott understands getting worked up over a theft. Void, he’s killed people for it! They respawned, obviously, but still: Scott understands the impulse.

On the other hand, Lucille made it very clear that the unicorn soldiers do not like violence, and Scott doesn’t want to get in the habit of bribing them too often. He just doesn’t vibe with that kind of financial liability. Besides, statistically speaking, he’ll probably run into someone with morals eventually, and then where would he be?

So the violence probably needs to end. Especially since Scott can easily just batch craft another stack of bread whenever he feels like it.

“Jamie, let-” Scott pauses for a moment, trying to remember which of this language’s two not-names Jamie had used for the child. “...Let her go.”

“What!? But she’s nicking!”

“I know,” Scott agrees. “Now can you let her go?”

Jamie huffs. Scott tries to do the expression Lucille does that makes the kids look guilty and do what she wants, and he must succeed, because Jamie sort of throws the other child away from him. Said child proceeds to run out of his shop, bread still clutched in her bony hands.

It’s right about then that Scott realizes how small that child was, even compared to Jamie, another half-tall player. …Strange. He’ll look into that later.

“Jamie.”

Jamie huffs and glares. He’s upset about having to end the scuffle, if Scott is reading that expression right.

“Jamie, I understand wanting to get some energy out, but you can’t go picking fights in the middle of my shop.”

“But she was *nicking!*” Jamie shouts.

“I know-”

“Then why’d you stop me!? I could’ve gotten it back!”

Scott sighs. Getting the bread back would’ve been easy, for him or for Jamie, but that’s not the issue here. So how does Scott explain that?

“Yes. You could’ve gotten it back.”

“So why-”

Scott holds up a hand, and Jamie purses his mouth shut to listen.

“You could’ve gotten it back. But you would’ve caused a fight doing it.”

“So!?” Jamie huffs. “Who cares if I start a fight?”

Scott bites his lip. It’s a gesture he picked up from Lucille, and he’s not quite sure what it’s supposed to mean, but he’s taken to doing it when he’s nervous. It ought to help him blend in, at any rate.

But blending in won’t help him navigate this conversation. He needs to focus on getting his point across. So how does he explain to Jamie that, right now, fighting is not a good thing?

“There’s times to fight—” Scott starts, not quite sure where he’s going, “—and there’s times to set things aside. This is not a time to fight, Jamie.”

Jamie grimaces, then glares.

“But she was nicking!”

“And you did the same thing the first time you met me,” Scott retorts.

Jamie jerks back. It’s almost like he’s been hit, but without the flash of red to confirm it, and with no nearby mob to have dealt the damage.

“Getting into a fight with you back then wouldn’t have fixed anything, just like fighting that kid now won’t do anything but get the two of you hurt. Or worse, you’d get the military police involved, and then you’d *both* be in trouble for fighting.”

Jamie is staring at the ground, now. It makes it tricky to try and read his expressions, but Scott can recognize the embarrassment in the way Jamie is refusing to look at him.

"...Sorry Mr. Smajor," Jamie mumbles. "I won't start any more fights."

"Good," Scott praises, making sure to smile like all the players here do when they're happy. "Now go find that kid and apologize."

Scott sweeps back behind his counter, leaving a gaping Jamie behind.

Jamie has no idea what Smajor is thinking.

Avoiding fights? Alright, sure. Adults tend to think that's the best thing anyone can do. Jamie can go along with it, if it's absolutely necessary.

Apologizing to some random girl because she tried to steal from Mr. Smajor? What the actual hell! *She's* the issue here! *She* should be apologizing! But now Smajor is gonna be upset if Jamie doesn't go apologize, so the hunt for thief-girl is on.

Jamie has spent enough time in Trost to know the streets. That doesn't mean it's easy to find the girl, though: She's slippery, and she's smaller than Jamie is, so she probably has shortcuts that Jamie can't follow.

"Flipping blue-hair weirdo," Jamie grumbles after half an hour of searching.

If Jamie makes a good enough effort, Smajor won't be too upset about the lack of actual apology, right? He'll probably just be happy Jamie tried at all.

Just as Jamie is getting ready to turn back, thief-girl comes into view.

Shit. Now Jamie actually has to apologize.

"Hey!"

Thief-girl looks up and flinches when she sees Jamie.

Jamie suddenly feels very awkward. How does this whole apology thing work, again? Is there a formula? Because if so, Jamie certainly doesn't know it.

"Uhm."

Thief-girl looks two seconds away from running, but she's still here, so Jamie will take that as a win.

“Sorry for roughing you up earlier.”

There. Apology accomplished. Smajor had better be proud.

Thief-girl looks a little confused for a second. Just as Jamie registers that, though, she gets a contemplative look.

“Did the baker tell you to say that?”

Jamie huffs. Smartass.

“And what if he did?”

Thief-girl is quiet, for a moment. She seems like she’s thinking.

“He seems nice.”

“...He is.”

Okay, maybe thief-girl isn’t so bad, if she can at least recognize that Mr. Smajor is pretty awesome (...if admittedly a bit eccentric). That doesn’t mean Jamie likes her, though. She still stole from the bakery.

“I’m Mina Carolina,” thief-girl introduces herself. “Who are you?”

“...Jamie.”

Pearl stands on flimsy dirt scaffolding, high above the creeping sculk of the Ancient City. So high, in fact, that even the warden can’t reach her here. And yet, there’s still a roof above her.

Pearl is working on that.

Excavation is the first step. Pearl will dig herself space, a massive chasm from the surface down to the deep dark. The sort of place that sucks up lives — after all, even if you manage to clutch the landing, the noise will almost certainly trigger the warden, and then you’re running for your life.

The chasm is still only the first step, though. Next will come a tower, stretching upward in the center of the chasm, so Pearl can see enemies coming from any direction. There will be only one bridge, defensible from on high, and any attempts by attackers to make another entrance will be met with arrows and TNT.

Pearl glances at the wither skulls still in her inventory. If the TNT

doesn’t work, Pearl will escalate to more dramatic solutions.

“That’s right Bubbles,” Pearl murmurs to her new companion’s place in her inventory. “I didn’t survive *Them* just to permadie on some death server in the middle of nowhere.”

Chapter End Notes

> Ooh, is that a minor AoT character getting screentime? Maybe I'll reject canon and let her live...
>
> Anyway. Pearl is Not Okay. This will cause no problems for anyone, I'm sure. Also Jamie lives out a character-defining flashback while Scott just says whatever to get out of having to bribe the Military Police again.
>
> Catch y'all whenever I next get time to write! ^v^

The J'Chapter of J'Friends and J'Andesite

Chapter Summary

> In which a lot of j'things j'happen and the j'author writes a j'cliffhanger.

Chapter Notes

> J'nice to j'see all of j'you again!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Lucille forces herself to take a deep breath as the Scouting Legion headquarters comes into view. She's not really sure what she expected, but the whole 'committing the rest of her life to fighting man-eating abominations' thing is starting to settle in.

…Why did she decide to do this again?

"I'd rather it be me than my kids. And I'd rather my kids remember me as brave than as terrified, and I'd rather spend my last moments living as I am than in fear."

…Right. Them.

And the kids, of course. Lucille is doing it for the kids. Not because Menn should've been the one to-

(*Lucille's throat gets tight.*)

Lucille purses her lips and looks over the Scouting Legion headquarters. It looks… normal. Like any other military barracks. It's just row after row of weathered stone and small windows, with a few larger buildings that are probably for eating or storing weapons.

What did Lucille expect, though? At the end of the day, the Scouting Legion is just another branch of the military, if a particularly suicidal one. Though Lucille should probably break the habit of thinking of them like that, since she's joining them now.

The wagon trundles to a stop.

"Welcome to your home for the foreseeable future, Salus," Officer Fay calls, already jumping down from the wagon. "Come on, I'll introduce

you to the rest of the squad."

Lucille scurries down from the wagon.

"Am I on your squad?"

"Yeah."

"But isn't that a little weird? Or do you always take the new recruits?"

"Nah, that's not really my thing. But since you're technically a transfer and not a new recruit, and my squad has an opening anyway, you get to come with us."

Lucille hums. Now that she thinks about it, she's technically an experienced soldier, isn't she? Well, not really experienced, but she's not new either.

She wonders whether someone will be willing to help her figure out the maneuver gear that all the soldiers wear, since she skipped the actual training part of joining the military. Maybe Officer Fay can give her some pointers?

"Squad Leader Fay!" someone shouts.

Lucille looks up. A sturdy man with short, military-cut brown hair is waving Officer Fay over. Officer Fay nods, then looks to Lucille and jerks her head.

Lucille follows obediently. Rather than leading her to a barracks or something, Officer Fay heads over to the man who just called for her. Do they know each other?

Wait, stupid question. Of course they know each other. They're both Scouts, and there would be no reason to call out if they weren't acquainted.

"It's good to see you back safe," the man says.

"Good to be back," Officer — no, Squad Leader — Fay agrees. "I trust everything went well while I was gone?"

A woman standing next to the man shrugs.

"Same old, same old. Just a bit of training between expeditions. Nothing interesting."

Lucille looks around awkwardly. There's three people here she doesn't know, and then Squad Leader Fay, who she's spoken to a grand total of, what, three times? She wants to ask who's who, and what she should be doing right now, but she's a bit scared of interrupting. After all, the refugee camp had taught her that soldiers don't typically like interruptions.

Fortunately for Lucille, Squad Leader Fay takes the matter out of her hands.

"Speaking of interesting, this is our new squadmate," she says, indicating Lucille.

All three people are suddenly staring at Lucille. She shuffles, slightly, but musters her courage and waves as politely as she can.

"You a Garrison transfer, then?" asks a man with dark hair that's been shaved on the left side.

Lucille shakes her head.

"You can't be a new recruit," the woman says skeptically.

"Salus here is one of the draftees from the mission to retake Wall Maria," Squad Leader Fay explains. "Once the whole thing was over, she came up to me and asked to join the Scouts."

Three pairs of eyebrows raise. A tiny part of Lucille wants to laugh — if that's their reaction to her, she wonders what expressions they'd make seeing Smajor. They'd probably gape and look generally stupid.

…Well, she knows what she'll do if they turn out to be jerks.

"You haven't got any actual training, then," the woman says cynically.

Lucille shrugs.

"We didn't get much time for that, to be honest."

Squad Leader Fay nods along.

"Most of the time until the next expedition will probably be spent getting you up to speed. You seemed to manage alright without the ODM gear, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't know how to use it."

"Wait, you mean they sent the draftees out there unarmed?"

“We had swords,” Lucille offers. “Just not the maneuver gear y’all soldiers use so much.”

Three sets of eyebrows raise.

“You’re really lucky to be alive then, aren’t you?” the woman says.

“Lucky, absolutely insane,” Squad Leader Fay muses. “Take your pick.”

“…’Absolutely insane’?”

Squad Leader Fay glances at Lucille.

“Salus. I want you to tell me how many times you intentionally went in a titan’s mouth.”

Lucille purses her lips. That would be however many titans she killed, minus one for the first, accidental time. What was that again?

“The fact that you didn’t immediately say ‘zero’ proves my point.”

Lucille purses her lips. That’s… fair, unfortunately. A bit harsh, though. She’s not *insane*, she just had to improvise since she didn’t have the maneuver gear!

“…The fuck?”

The rest of Lucille’s new squad is staring at her like she’s insane. … Lucille is blaming Squad Leader Fay for that.

“It’s not like I had maneuver gear!” Lucille defends. “I had to improvise!”

“You had to improvise… by going in a titan’s mouth?” the dark-haired man asks.

“You can cut your way out through the back and kill them that way.”

The squad’s collective eyebrows are at severe risk of merging with their hairlines, Lucille thinks. Really, has nobody thought to try and cut their way out when they get eaten before? Or is getting swallowed whole just that rare when you’re not actively trying to jump down a titan’s throat to stab it from the inside?

Suddenly, the woman laughs.

“Well, points for originality, at least,” she says, sticking out her hand. “I’m Nilla. You?”

“Lucille.”

Lucille swears she hears her bones creak when Nilla squeezes her hand. She has to fight to keep a wince off her face, but Nilla either doesn’t realize how tightly she’s gripping, or she’s a sadist who doesn’t give a damn.

…Lucille hopes it’s the former.

“I’m Hurtz,” the brown-haired man introduces himself. “And this here —” he begins, grabbing the dark-haired man’s shoulder “—is J’Micheal. His name’s a bit j’weird, but I promise he’s really j’nice once you get to know him.”

Lucille blinks. Tries to parse the sentence she just heard. Blinks again. Makes eye contact with Nilla, then Squad Leader Fay, hoping one of them will take mercy on her and explain why Hurtz is adding the letter J in places it has no right to be.

“Screw off,” the man whose name is either J’Micheal or just Micheal says.

…Just Micheal? J’Micheal? Is that some weird contraction-of-a-nickname scenario?

“I’m J’Micheal—” he explains, now making eye contact “—and you can ignore all the other stuff from these *jerks*,” he finishes, glaring at Hurtz.

“Right,” Lucille agrees, deciding right then and there to adopt her patented, Smajor-tested, don’t-ask-too-many-questions technique.

“Well, nice to meet you all. Out of curiosity, would any of you be willing to help me figure out that maneuver gear all y’all soldiers use so much?”

Lucille receives three awkward looks, followed by three equally awkward nods.

…She’s dead, isn’t she?

“Jamie, look what I found!”

Jamie turns to see thief-girl sprinting up the street. Mina. Whoever. The point is, she's coming to bother Jamie *yet again*, even after two bread-loaves' worth of bribery this week. What does she even want this time?

"Mina."

Mina grins far too wide for someone who barely tolerates her. Jamie gets strange looks from Armin and his friends, who insisted on tagging along when Jamie invited Armin to the bakery today, but that's fine. Jamie could honestly care less.

…Especially about Eren. That dude really needs to chill. Joining the Scouts? Okay, fine. It's stupid, and it's terrifying, but Lucille did it, so it can't be too bad, even if Jamie still stays up late sometimes worrying about her. Shouting about "annihilating every last titan" without any prompting whatsoever? Jamie doesn't even know where to start.

Jamie doesn't have time to further contemplate Eren's insanity, though, because Mina presents a long, slightly worn skirt.

"I saw someone throwing it out and they let me have it! It's not even torn, either!"

"That's lucky," Armin pitches in, ever-polite.

"Who's *this*?" Eren asks, far less politely.

"I'm Mina!" Mina says. "Jamie's friend!"

Okay, Jamie can't let this stand.

"We're not friends."

Armin looks at Jamie a bit strangely. Mina just smiles like she's won something.

"So I'm wondering whether I should keep the skirt or rip it into bandages and sell them," Mina continues, unperturbed. "What do you think, Jamie?"

Jamie considers. From what Mina has said the past few times Jamie has spoken with her, she has some younger siblings to take care of, but the skirt is pretty big, so it's unlikely to fit any of them, and Mina is doing just fine herself on the clothes front. Plus, even if Mina did

need a new skirt, the one she's holding is a little long. So, logically, the answer is bandages.

…But Jamie feels a bit weird saying that. The skirt really is in good condition, even if it would probably fit Jamie better than Mina or her siblings.

(And isn't that a thought? Jamie in a skirt.)

(*It doesn't feel as weird as Jamie thinks it ought to.*)

"…Bandages," Jamie says at last. "You don't need a new skirt yet."

"Yeah," Mina agrees. "And the money from this will help hold us until I can join the military."

"You're joining the military?" Armin asks.

"Yup! I'm gonna send the paycheck to my siblings."

"And kill all the titans, right!?"

Jamie resists the urge to facepalm. This is why you never talk about joining the military around Eren, even if you plan to: All it does is set him off.

"Umm… I guess?"

"I'm gonna join the military and become a Scout so I can exterminate every last titan!" Eren exclaims with just a bit too much bloodlust to sound sane.

Jamie, in a heroic display of determination, doesn't groan.

(Rest in peace, free afternoon.)

"Hello, and welcome to my bakery!" Scott announces proudly, in the exact same tone he uses for video intros.

It's a little strange how much of Scott's content creator skillset transfers over to customer service, actually. Greetings? That's just an intro. Upset customer? Yeah, time to put those acting skills to use and pretend he actually cares. Trying to actually sell something? It's like he's getting a sponsorship from himself!

"You're Smajor, right?"

Scott glances down at a half-tall player with blond hair pulled back in some kind of twisty shape. The half-tall ones seem to be most likely to not have any money, and thus most likely to steal, but they don't typically talk to him before they do, instead trying to avoid notice altogether. Maybe this one is actually planning to pay, though? Or maybe they just got lost?

"That I am!" he agrees, shoving his speculation to the side. "What can I help you with?"

"I'm just a bit curious," the player says. "Everyone around here seems to say that this bakery popped up overnight. It's almost like their memories of it being built were taken away."

Twisty-Hair — AnnieLeonhart, according to the nametag — pauses and stares directly at Scott, face not moving an inch. Apparently players here *can* talk without doing the weird face-communication thing. Maybe there's some kind of social rule about when or when not to use it?

"Isn't that weird!" Scott says after an appropriate, not-too-fast-and-not-too-slow pause. "I suppose you're here to try some of the bread behind the intrigue?"

"I'm more interested in how a shop gets built without anyone noticing."

A pause.

Tense silence.

Customer service really is like content creation, Scott thinks. People can say and/or spam whatever they want, with as little logic or evidence as they want, and it only matters if Scott acknowledges it.

(Or if there's actual evidence to the rumor, but for his own peace of mind, Scott is going to ignore that little technicality.)

"You see," AnnieLeonhart continues, "I want to be an architect when I grow up. You wouldn't mind letting me look around, would you?"

Scott blinks. He hasn't heard the word 'architect' before, but based on the context…

"You want to build things?"

AnnieLeonhart nods.

Relief floods Scott. The approach could use some work — Scott felt like he was being interrogated or something for a moment, there — but asking to see a build up close to improve your own projects? Honestly, it's the most normal player thing he's seen since getting to this server.

"Well, follow me! Anything in particular that you wanted to see?"

"...the basement."

Scott nods and starts heading to the trapdoor. It's lucky his actual basement is hidden: He can show off his bakery-only storage without accidentally interfering with this server's development in a way that earns him the interrogation he thought he was getting from AnnieLeonhart.

Oh, he is *so* glad he bothered decorating!

AnnieLeonhart is still waiting on the customer side of the counter when Scott flips open the trapdoor.

"Come on!" he says, gesturing like Jamie and the rest of the half-tall players do when they need his attention.

AnnieLeonhart follows slowly, utilizing the universal I'm-in-a-cave-and-I-hear-a-monster-but-I-can't-see-it-yet shuffle. To be fair, though, trapdoors go down to mines and caves all the time.

"Don't worry, it's lit up," Scott assures before climbing down the ladder.

After a slight delay, AnnieLeonhart follows him down.

"Ta-da!" Scott declares, punching the air to indicate his storage room. "See the, uh, trees supporting the roof?"

"...The pillars?" AnnieLeonhart asks.

"Yeah, the pillars. I had to use oak wood, so the, uh… small doors, I used them as decoration instead of part of the pillars, but I really like the way it turned out!"

AnnieLeonhart makes an unknown expression. Had Scott said something wrong?

Wait, no, he needs to make an expression, doesn't he? All the builder talk had brought back his normal-player instincts… Doing one of the friendly smiles he's worked so hard to figure out is easy enough, though, and AnnieLeonhart doesn't ask if anything is wrong with Scott's face, so he'll take it as a win.

AnnieLeonhart starts milling around the room, looking at different details. They pause for a particularly long time to look at the shelving, which Scott will readily admit isn't his best work, but, in his defense, he hadn't known he would be showing it off today.

"Weird storage system for a bakery, isn't it?"

Scott blinks. Sure, his storage isn't the prettiest (yet), but that doesn't make it *weird*. AnnieLeonhart needs to learn how to give constructive criticism, it seems.

"I prefer to think of it as a work in progress!" Scott chirps, rather than launching into a lecture.

(That part can come later.)

AnnieLeonhart hums, then flips open a chest. Then they close it, and flip open another… And another… And another.

Scott is suddenly reminded of Grian. Is Grian looking for him right now? Or does he think Scott just stuck around on the server to film an outro or something? Is he steering clear to avoid the blowback he got last time for killing Scott as soon as he won?

…No. Grian is definitely looking for him. He would have known something was up as soon as Pearl got back to Hermitcraft. In fact, he's probably looking for Scott right now! It's probably just taking a bit because of weird admin reasons or whatever.

(Grian wouldn't leave Scott alone here. *He wouldn't.*)

AnnieLeonhart flips the last chest closed, then squints at a patch of wall.

Scott's expression doesn't move. It probably never will — not on instinct, at least. But, if he was raised on this server, where changing one's skin to show emotions is the norm, and Scott had done it for so long it became instinct, he would certainly allow fear to flash across his face.

Why? Because AnnieLeonhart is looking directly at the patch of andesite that hides Scott's *actual* basement.

Chapter End Notes

J'sorry for the j'cliffhanger-
J'wait. No I'm not.

End Notes

Wow. You actually made it to the end of this abomination. Congrats. Your perseverance will be sung of for generations to come.
If, by some chance, you actually liked this fic, I recommend you see an otolaryngologist (tongue doctor), because your sense of taste is obviously broken. Also leave kudos and comment, because I like them ^-^
Anyway, see you next time ^-^

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!